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RETRO POP

THE ULTIMATE POP MAGAZINE

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BEST OF 2023

Our year-end charts revealed!

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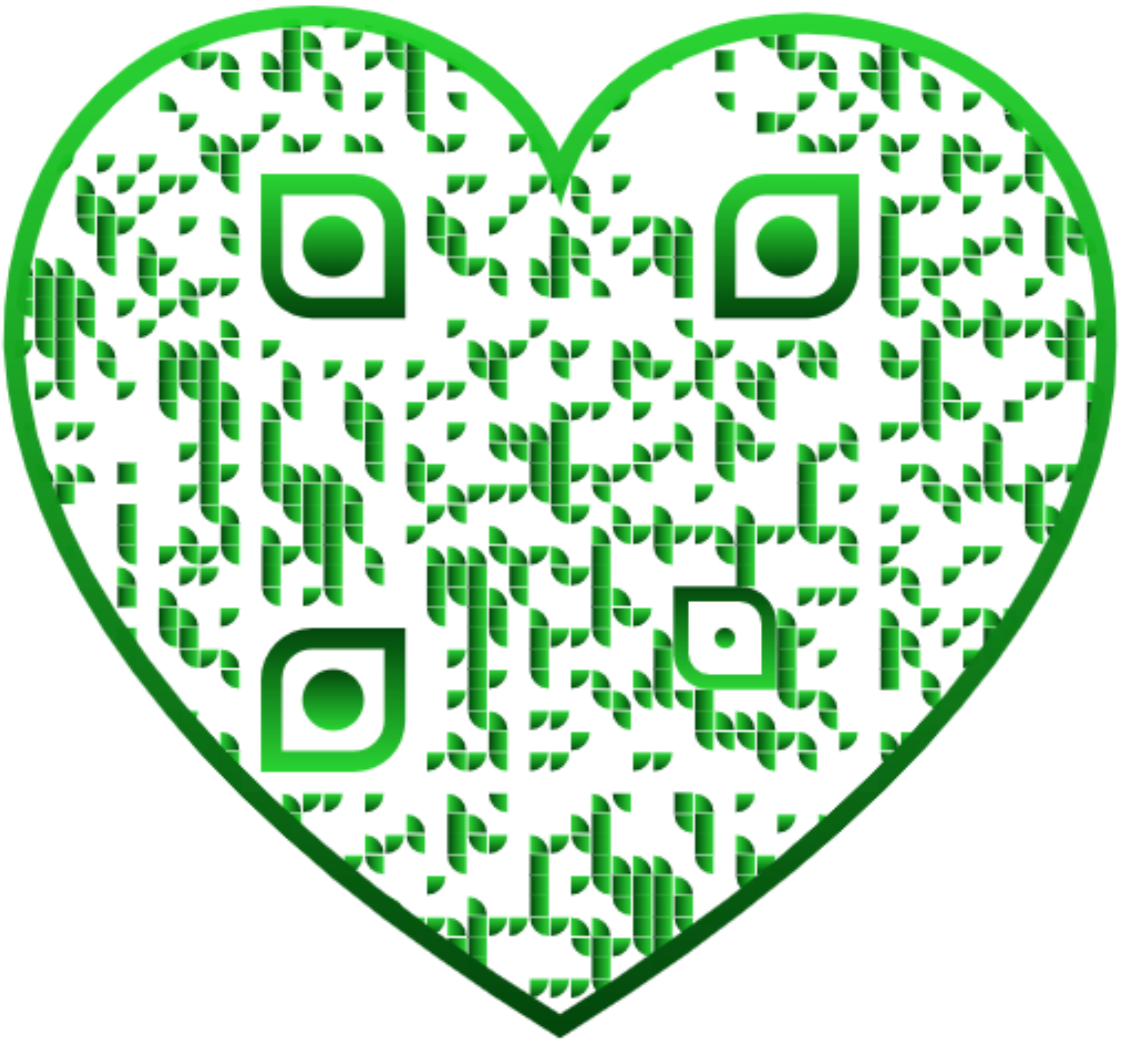

JAMES ARTHUR

BITTER SWEET LOVE

World Tour

UK & EUROPEAN DATES 2024

26 Jan - Sporthalle, *Hamburg*
27 Jan - Palladium, *Cologne*
29 Jan - Cirque Royal, *Brussels*
30 Jan - Jahrhunderthalle, *Frankfurt*
2 Feb - Zenith, *Munich*
4 Feb - Volkshaus, *Zurich*
5 Feb - Fabrique, *Milan*

7 Feb - Den Atelier, *Luxembourg*
8 Feb - Le Trianon, *Paris*
11 Feb - TivoliVredenburg (Ronda), *Utrecht*
13 Feb - Store VEGA, *Copenhagen*
15 Feb - Filadelfia, *Stockholm*
16 Feb - Sentrum Scene, *Oslo*
19 Feb - Columbiahalle, *Berlin*

20 Feb - Stodola, *Warsaw*
22 Feb - Forum Karlin, *Prague*
24 Feb - Gasometer, *Vienna*
25 Feb - Barba Negra, *Budapest*
3 Mar - 3Arena, *Dublin*
5 Mar - International Centre, *Bournemouth*
6 Mar - Utilita Arena, *Birmingham*

8 Mar - Utilita Arena, *Sheffield*
9 Mar - Utilita Arena, *Newcastle*
10 Mar - Connexin Live, *Hull*
13 Mar - OVO Hydro, *Glasgow*
15 Mar - AO Arena, *Manchester*
16 Mar - OVO Arena Wembley, *London*

Jamesarthurofficial.com

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FLASHBACK

DOM BROWN

From playing with everyone from Take That to Elton John and later joining Duran Duran as the band's full-time touring guitarist, **Dom Brown** looks back on his life in music.

Multi-instrumentalist Dom Brown had plans to launch as a solo artist in his early years, but a hunger to get out and play live led him down a career path he could never have imagined!

"I'd been doing my own projects through my teens and my 20s and by the time I was in my late 20s, I realised I wanted to branch out and do sessions," says the musician. "My initial introduction to that world was predominantly miming [on TV shows] and it was exciting and a lot of fun, because you're surrounded by these world famous artists – I was working with people like Elton John, Lionel Richie, Rod Stewart...

"But I had to learn the guitar parts on the records so it looked like I was playing them, and I was thinking, 'Jeez man, I could come up with these parts' and 'I could record this stuff'," he laughs. "It was great fun, don't get me wrong – we were travelling to some great places, I was meeting some amazing musicians doing the same thing as me... But yeah, it was frustrating because I knew I could do that, and it's more of an expression if you're actually performing live."

Not only did it give him a taste of life on stage and on the road, but touring the world with his idols was also the encouragement Dom needed to take his career forward. "Lionel Richie was one of the first artists who really encouraged me, because I was backstage jamming and he heard me," he smiles. "We were just about to go on 'Top Of The Pops' or something, and he said 'Wow man, you can really play! I'd love to have you on my next tour.' I thought, 'I'd love to be on your next tour...' but the next day he was off to America, so it didn't quite happen.

"But the more and more I was doing these gigs, I was meeting more people who would hear me, and the word was getting around, then before I knew it I was doing live shows and work in the studio."

He continued to work with a wide range of acts, from All Saints' Appleton sisters, to Go West and Brian McFadden, but in 2004 his life changed forever when he was picked up by one of the biggest acts of the '80s: Duran Duran!

"That came around because I'd established a reputation as being a quick learner and quite good at getting my head around someone's set really quickly," he recalls. "Andy Taylor, the original guitarist, suddenly became quite ill, and I got a call on Wednesday morning from [producer] Fraser T. Smith, who had just been speaking to Duran Duran's tour manager and put me forward.

"He called me and said: 'Look, I've just put you forward for a gig. It's on Friday. Are you available to play with Duran Duran? Because they're going to call you in a minute...'"

They met, hit it off and days later - having only met John and Roger Taylor - he was introduced to Simon Le Bon and Nick Rhodes at soundcheck, played the gig, and the rest is history...

"At the end of that Friday they said, 'You've done great, do you fancy coming to America with us next week?' As part of the tour that they were doing," he laughs. "I said, 'Yeah, I'd love to. So, when are we going, when are we rehearsing?' And they said, 'Well, we're not going to be able to rehearse; we're going to have the soundcheck and run through the set a couple of times', and that night we played to 18,000 people."

Twenty years later and he's still in the fold, touring with the band and playing on their records, but would Dom ever consider becoming a full-time member of Duran Duran? "At one stage we got close to that, but it just didn't really work for them or for me," he admits. "They'd already had two official guitar players, and now wanted the image to be of four of the five original members.

"There was a moment when it was considered, but it also didn't really work for me, because I also wanted to have my autonomy and be able to do my own solo stuff and other sessions." **RP**

● ***Dom's latest solo album, 'In My Bones', is out now.***

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

RETROPOP

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an IRRESISTIBLE publication

HEY THERE!

When you edit a magazine like this, you almost forget that there's a world outside of what's happening in pop each month. It's wild!

That's why I always love this time of year, when we get to go back and revisit all of the brilliant music that's been released over the past 12 months - just one look at this issue's fabulous cover and you'll see just what I mean.

So for the final edition of **RETROPOP** to be released in 2023 - and, technically, our first of 2024 - we're looking back at our favourite releases and casting an eye to the future, with all of the exciting things already happening over the next year.

Fortunately for us, there's plenty coming up, so you can be sure our pages will be bursting with content for the foreseeable...

As always, there's loads more inside, including interviews with Wet Wet Wet and Jean-Michel Jarre, a celebration of 40 years of NOW Music, and a bumper Ones To Watch section, spotlighting the best up-and-coming stars you'll want to put on your radar for the new year.

Plus, we look back on the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony and opening night of Stock Aitken Waterman's 'I Should Be So Lucky' musical, and bring you all the latest from D:Ream, Suede, Take That and more.

Before you jump in and enjoy, I want to - again - say a huge THANK YOU for supporting the magazine for another year; it's been a pleasure to bring you all the latest from the world of pop every month.

However you spend the holidays, stay safe, have fun, and we'll be back in 2024 for **RETROPOP**'s biggest year yet!

Connor Gotto, Editor
@MrConnorGotto

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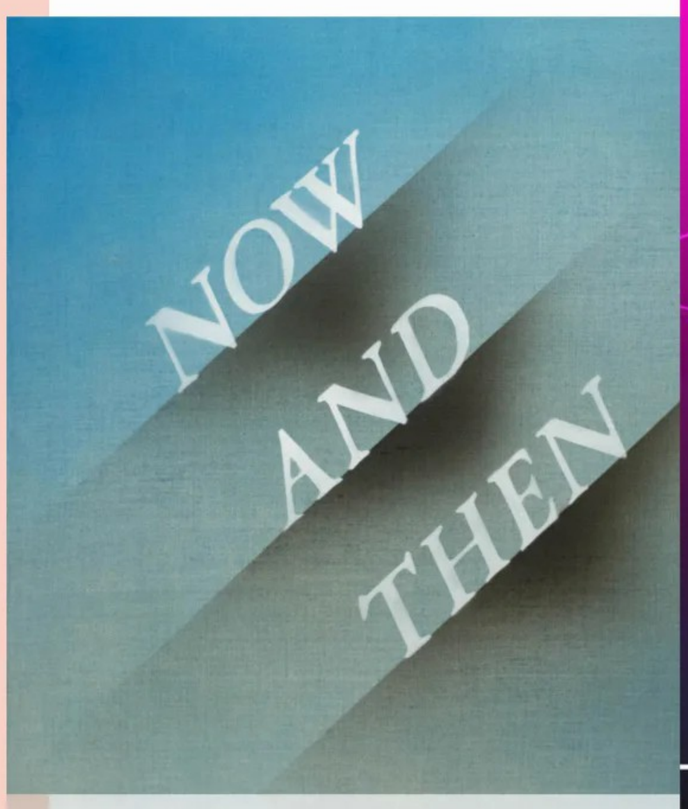

RETROPOP PLAYLIST

The latest releases from your favourite **RETROPOP** artists - all in one place!

THE BEATLES - *Now And Then* (UMG)
New music from The Beatles was not on the radar for 2023, but Now And Then - a recovered demo from the '60s - returned the Fab Four to the top of the charts, where they belong!

KYLIE MINOGUE - *Hold On To Now* (BMG)
A firm favourite from 'Tension', its latest single is Kylie through and through and an anthem for the search for love and meaning in life, with equal doses of melancholia and euphoria.

TAKE THAT - *This Life* (EMI)
The title song from the trio's latest LP sees Gary, Mark and Howard at their most contemplative, leaning into the softer, more introspective direction of their most-recent offering.

DOLLY PARTON & STEVIE NICKS - *What Has Rock And Roll Ever Done For You* (Big Machine)
A cast-off from Fleetwood Mac's 'Tango In The Night' sessions is Dolly and Stevie's gain, with this powerhouse duet a highlight from the country superstar's epic rock effort.

KAISER CHIEFS - *Feeling Alright* (V2)
Co-written with Nile Rodgers, *Feeling Alright* sees Ricky Wilson and co. fuse their penchant for chart-topping indie-rock with one of the Chic star's signature funky basslines - and it works!

JESSIE WARE - *Hello Love* (EMI)
A rare mid-tempo moment from the disco diva's fifth album, 'That! Feels Good!', its latest single is more reminiscent of her earlier material and showcases the soulful side to her voice.

PEGGY GOU & LENNY KRAVITZ - *I Believe In Love Again* (XL)
Lifted from the DJ and producer's forthcoming debut album, her collaboration with the rock legend delivers a kaleidoscopic disco production beneath Kravitz's timeless vocals.

SHERYL CROW - *Alarm Clock* (Big Machine)
Having previously shunned the idea of releasing records, the country star returns with a brand new album in the spring and its lead release is a storming slice of late-'90s sounding pop-rock.

DUA LIPA - *Houdini* (Warner)
No one's doing dance-pop like Dua Lipa and the first single from her third album, co-written and produced by Tame Impala's Kevin Parker, steers her sound in a fresh, psychedelic direction.

JAMES ARTHUR - *Homecoming* (Columbia)
The latest single from his upcoming album, 'Bitter Sweet Love', sees the family man yearn for familiarity, with his raw vocal over a stripped-back instrumental a winning formula.

HOW TO LISTEN

Scan the QR code and check out all the **RETROPOP** *playlists in one place, over on Spotify!*

Top Of The Pops *tales*

Step back in time as we revisit classic moments from the 'Top Of The Pops' archives!

#20 THE SPICE OF LIFE

August 2, 1996: Spice Girls – *Wannabe*

The Spice Girls were no strangers to 'Top Of The Pops' when they set foot in the studio.

The five-piece - Melanie C, Emma Bunton, Mel B, Geri Halliwell and Victoria Adams - made their first appearance on the show via satellite link from the Naritasan Shinsho-ji Temple in Tokyo, Japan, when their debut single, *Wannabe*, entered the UK Singles Chart at No. 3.

The following week it climbed to No. 1, where it stayed for a total of seven weeks, becoming the second-longest chart-topper by an all-female group, only behind Shakespears Sister's *Stay*.

After two remote appearances, the girls finally made their studio debut on the August 2 show - and it was backstage that the group was photographed for their Spice Rack feature in the show's accompanying magazine, the interview for which saw "lazy journalist" (Mel B's words, not ours!) Peter Loraine give the band members their lasting nicknames.

On the origins of Sporty, Baby, Scary, Ginger and Posh, Loraine told Bustle in 2015: "I simply said it would be a good idea if they had some nicknames. The girls liked the idea, so I had an editorial meeting back at the office and about four of us started thinking of names.

"Posh was the first one to be thought up because Victoria looks pretty sophisticated. The rest were pretty easy really because the girls' characters were already really strong. The names jumped out at us.

"We laughed the most when we came up with Scary. Jennifer Cawthron, who was also from Leeds, came up with that one because Mel B was so loud and had tried to take over our whole photo shoot.

"We ran the names for a couple of issues and the first time the girls saw them they thought it was funny. Then the newspapers started picking up on the names and they cropped up everywhere until they were fully accepted by everyone."

Twenty-seven years later and it's safe to say the names have stood the test of time. Meanwhile, *Wannabe* went on to become the best-selling girl group single ever, shifting 1.4 million units in the UK and over 7 million worldwide. Zig-a-zig ah, indeed! **RP**

● ***Follow @TOTPFacts on Twitter for live trivia commentary on the BBC Four repeats.***

TOP 10
THE OFFICIAL CHART FOR JULY 28, 1996

1 SPICE GIRLS
Wannabe

2 FUGEES
Killing Me Softly

3 PETER ANDRE FT BUBBLER RANX
Mysterious Girl

4 LOS DEL RIO
Macarena

5 MANIC STREET PREACHERS
Everything Must Go

6 UNDERWORLD
Born Slippy

7 ALANIS MORISSETTE
Head Over Feet

8 WINK
Higher State Of Consciousness 96 Remixes

9 NENEH CHERRY
Woman

10 GARY BARLOW
Forever Love

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO **PHOTOS** BBC / TOP OF THE POPS

LINE-UP NEWS

BEYONCÉ TIPPED FOR VEGAS SPHERE

Beyoncé is reportedly in talks to be the next artist to headline the Las Vegas Sphere.

The US superstar is being eyed for a $10 million show at the groundbreaking location, currently home to U2's 'U2:UV Achtung Baby Live At Sphere' residency and is said to have already toured the venue.

On the back of her 'Renaissance World Tour', she is believed to have had discussions with the executive chairman of MSG Networks, James Dolan, about doing a residency there next year.

It's no surprise Beyoncé is top of bosses' lists; the *Cuff It* star raked in a reported $579 million for her latest global jaunt, which became the highest-grossing tour ever by a female artist!

PHOTO RENASSANCE WORLD TOUR

New deal for Dido

Dido has signed an agreement with Warner Chappell Music covering new music and her catalogue.

The *Life For Rent* star's new contract with the company includes her previously-released material – spanning debut album 'No Angel' (1999) to her most-recent LP, 'Still On My Mind' (2019) – and future releases.

"Warner Chappell have been there for me from the very beginning of my songwriting journey, well over 25 years ago," she says. "They gave me my start and helped me create the songs that were the foundations of my first record and then over the years continued to be family. I'm excited for all the things we will create together now."

Guy Moot, co-chair and CEO of Warner Chappell Music, adds: "Dido is one of the most remarkable songwriters of this century. We're so pleased that she's put her faith in us again to represent one of the great modern songbooks.

"We look forward to working with her on new projects and continuing to promote her incredible catalogue in exciting and creative ways."

PHOTO SIMON EMMETT

IN THE LOOP

KYLIE MINOGUE's ninth album, 'Body Language', is coming to vinyl for the first time on February 22

ENRIQUE IGLESIAS says his next album will be his last

GOSSIP have reunited for their first album in over a decade, 'Real Power', out March 22

NELLY FURTADO and **JESSIE WARE** will headline next year's Mighty Hoopla

S Club pause US gigs

PHOTO LEIGH KELLY

S Club have delayed their forthcoming tour of the US and Canada until February.

The *Never Had A Dream Come True* hitmakers had been set to take the 'Good Times Tour' Stateside in November, but the shows were postponed owing to "an administration issue that is beyond the group's control".

Five of the dates have been rescheduled with existing tickets remaining valid for the new shows in Toronto, Boston, New York, and Chicago.

The concert originally scheduled for November 6 at Dolby Theatre has been moved to The Orpheum Theatre, with all orders set to be refunded for fans to purchase tickets for the new date.

Due to scheduling difficulties, concerts originally booked for November 5 at The Warfield, San Francisco and November 14 at Franklin Music Hall, Philadelphia have been cancelled. AXS tickets will be automatically refunded, with refunds available at the original point of purchase for all other tickets.

Tickets for the February shows are on sale now.

BRITNEY SPEARS TEASES MEMOIR PT. 2

Britney Spears is reportedly working on a second volume of her memoir for a planned release next year.

The singer's latest book, 'The Woman In Me', was released in October and has dominated headlines for revelations about her abortion whilst dating Justin Timberlake and subsequent breakup with the *NSYNC star.

Following its publication, the *Everytime* star took to social media with a since-deleted post, hinting a follow-up is in progress.

"Humor is the cure to everything !!! Play on !!! Volume 2 will be released next year ... get ready!" she penned.

The pop princess also appeared to tease new music, telling fans on Instagram she's working on a new single that appears to be titled *Hate You To Like Me*.

"I wrote a new song," she penned alongside a shot from the music video to her 2001 song, *Overprotected*.

"No beef with anyone... just being a narcissist in a claimed, self-entitled way," she added. "It's to accumulate interest by giving ego with my eyes closed because I hear important people do that these days."

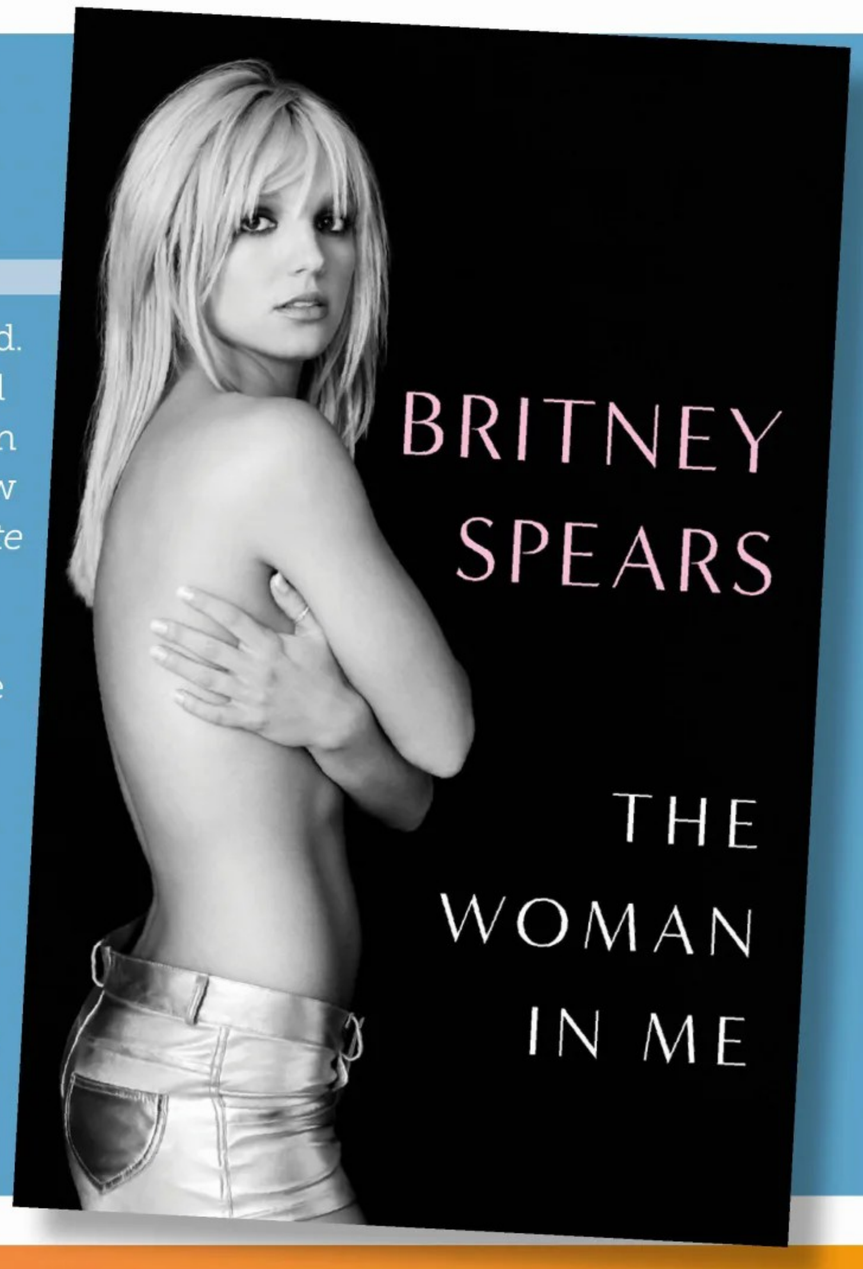

PHOTO HERB RITTS / TRUNK ARCHIVE

COLDPLAY have asked fans to contribute to their new song, *One World*, from their forthcoming album, 'Moon Music'

WHAM! and **MARIAH CAREY** returned to the UK Singles Chart with their holiday hits earlier than ever this year

TINA TURNER's earliest solo albums have been released on digital platforms for the first time

BOY GEORGE has joined the cast of Broadway's 'Moulin Rouge!'

LINE-UP NEWS

The Beatles are back on top

The Beatles landed a record-breaking No. 1 with their "final" single, *Now And Then*.

Last month, the Fab Four leapt 41 places from their No. 42 debut – based on just 10 hours of sales following its release on November 2 – to the top spot on the UK Singles Chart.

In doing so, the song – which uses WingNut Films' groundbreaking MAL audio technology to 'reunite' the inimitable group one last time – marks 60 years since their first No. 1 single, *From Me To You*, becoming the longest-ever gap between an act's first and last chart-topping hit.

It's also the band's 18th UK No. 1, extending The Beatles' record as the British act with the most chart-toppers. Only Elvis Presley, with 21 No. 1s, has more to his name.

Upon hearing the news, Paul McCartney told OfficialCharts: "It's mind boggling. It's blown my socks off. It's also a very emotional moment for me. I love it!"

"What's happening it's all happening number one in England UK incredible a few more facts will come on the screen" added Ringo Starr in a social media post. "Peace and love everybody. It's a beautiful day."

John Lennon first wrote and recorded a demo of *Now And Then* with piano and vocals in the late 1970s at his home in New York's Dakota building, with his wife Yoko Ono passing the track to McCartney, Starr and George Harrison in 1994, along with the demos for *Free As A Bird* and *Real Love*.

Both of those songs were completed and released in the mid-'90s as part of the band's 'Anthology' project.

PHOTO APPLE CORPS LTD

RICK ASTLEY'S ROCKIN' NEW YEAR

Rick Astley will ring in 2024 as part of the BBC's New Year celebrations.

The pop legend, who recently returned to the charts with his ninth album, 'Are We There Yet?', will round out the year from Camden's iconic Roundhouse.

With the '80s icon to be joined on stage by some very special guests, the show will include classic hits and surprise numbers before and after the clocks chime midnight.

"What an honour it is to host the New Year's Eve celebration on BBC One this year," he says. "It's always been part of my New Year's ritual to watch the show and take in the amazing fireworks, so to be part of it this year is fantastic! Here's to a great night."

Jonathan Rothery, Head of BBC Pop Music TV, adds: "Our annual New Year's Eve performances on BBC One are about bringing some of the biggest names in music to people's homes, wherever they are in the UK.

"The last few years have seen performances from Sam Ryder in 2022, Olly Alexander, Kylie, Pet Shop Boys in 2021 and Alicia Keys in 2020 and I'm so pleased to be able to announce that Rick Astley – who has had a fantastic 2023 so far – will be soundtracking the celebrations this year.

"It's a brilliant way to round off another fantastic year of live performances on the BBC."

PHOTO PETER NEILL

IN THE LOOP

TEXAS will play The O2, London for the first time as part of their 2024 arena tour

SHERYL CROW's new album, 'Evolution', will be released on March 29

MATT GOSS has quietly cancelled plans for the follow-up to his Top 10 solo album, 'The Beautiful Unknown'

JACK SAVORETTI is putting the "final touches" on his new album

KAISER CHIEFS' EASY 8

PHOTO CAL McINTYRE

Kaiser Chiefs are back with their brand new studio album, the aptly titled 'Kaiser Chiefs' Easy Eighth Album', out March 1, 2024.

Produced by Amir Amor, the LP sees the band return with a fresh and bold new sound, featuring new single *Feeling Alright* – co-written by Nile Rodgers – along with previous releases *How 2 Dance* and *Jealousy*.

Of their latest track, frontman Ricky Wilson explains: "On the first day with Nile Rodgers, he said 'What have you got?' We searched through some jams we had and this was a song that stood out to him.

"The band loved playing it round and round, and it must be fun to play but we never really knew where it would find a home. Nile turned out to be the best estate agent and found it a home almost immediately.

"He also brought in Amir, who turned out to be our housemate for the entire record. A good place to start!"

'Kaiser Chiefs' Easy Eighth Album' is out March 1.

JASON DONOVAN IS DOIN' FINE

Jason Donovan will hit the road in 2025 for his 'Doin' Fine 25' UK tour.

The Aussie star will play a run of shows in celebration of his 35 years in entertainment, set to feature classics from his Stock Aitken Waterman written-and-produced albums, 'Ten Good Reasons' (1989) and 'Between The Lines' (1990), along with later recordings and musical selections such as his chart-topping rendition of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Any Dream Will Do*.

"I am really excited about this tour," says Jason. "My musical journey has been an incredible ride, and I can't wait to celebrate it by performing the songs that have been such an important part of my life and career.

"It's going to be a fantastic show, and I look forward to sharing these unforgettable moments with the audience."

Tickets are on sale now.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

DAFT PUNK have turned down an offer to reunite for the Paris 2024 Olympics

BRYAN ADAMS and **DAVE STEWART** are touring the US from January through March

SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR has released a deluxe version of her latest album, 'HANA', with a previously-unreleased track

CHER has hinted at plans to return to the road in the near future

KOOL & THE GANG drummer and co-founder, George 'Funky' Brown, has died aged 74

As **Madonna** revisits 40 years of success with her global 'Celebration Tour', the hosts of the Inside The Groove podcast explore how she became an icon and the most successful solo female recording artist on the planet!

INSIDE THE GROOVE

● *For more Madonna, listen to Inside The Groove wherever you get your podcasts.*

BEDTIME STORIES RELEASED: October 1994

In the liner notes for 'Bedtime Stories', Madonna thanks her assistant (later her manager) Caresse Henry for "keeping me from doing something I might regret later". Whilst we can only guess what that might be, there may be a clue in another note where she thanks Shep Pettibone "for being understanding".

Indeed, at some point between the release of 'Erotica' and the spring of 1994, the pair had recorded half a dozen songs, described by the producer as being in a "Spinners' style" - probably reference to the Detroit Spinners, whose sound was a hybrid of Tamla Motown and early-Philadelphia disco. That certainly describes one of the tracks, *Love Won't Wait*, which Madonna later passed to Gary Barlow, whose version hit No.1 in 1997.

We can only wonder why Madonna changed direction, but chances are she felt the need for a clean break from the 'Erotica' sound and a step towards a cooler, R&B vibe that would help repair some of the damage caused by the racy themes of that record and the accompanying 'Sex' book. Indeed, whilst lead single *Secret* did reasonably well, it's the Babyface collaboration, *Take A Bow*, that went on to become one of Madonna's highest-selling singles in the US - so she was right to trust her instincts!

Conversely, the latter track did poorly in the UK, with its very US radio-friendly sound not quite so cool over here. Instead, the tracks recorded with British Producer Nellee Hooper fared far better and paved the way for a European influence in Madonna's music. She would work almost solely with French, British and Swedish producers for the next 12 years to great success.

But the backlash did provide her with one of the most enduring songs of her career; *Human Nature* would be the final single from the release in 1995 and can be heard on most of her subsequent concerts, including the 'Celebration Tour'.

The original shoot for the album was a set of ethereal, 1930s-style images by photographer Paolo Roversi, but according to an interview with Madonna a few years after they were taken, the record company was worried that the snaps were too blurry and they were instead relegated to the 12" version of the title track. She later had an updated shoot with Patrick Demarchelier at the Miami Beach hotel on her 36th birthday, with many of the images featuring Madonna hanging upside down off the side of the bed. It was one of these shots that was chosen for the final sleeve, aided by some simple pink and baby blue lettering. When the album was repressed a few years later, the image was rotated the 'right way up'.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER RELEASED: November 1995

You'd be forgiven for wondering what the background to Madonna's mid-'90s compilation. A contractual obligation? A chance to show off her new vocal range? Or maybe a further attempt to soften her image which – whilst improved by songs like *I'll Remember* and *Take A Bow* – still hung over Madonna's reputation in the US...

Whatever the reason, her ballad compilation provided three new songs, a remix and an opportunity for one of her '80s tracks to finally be released in the UK.

Originally titled 'I Want You', the LP had centred around a cover version recorded with Massive Attack of the Marvin Gaye song. It had been recorded for a tribute album and a video was shot by director Earle Sebastian, but when - for contractual reasons - the single was blocked from release, the album was retitled, the artwork changed and the rather beautiful ballad, *You'll See*, was instead released to radio in October 1995.

Witten with David Foster, who had penned hits for Michael Jackson, Olivia Newton-John and Lionel Richie, it was one of three songs the pair recorded together during the period in which Madonna was training her voice in preparation for 'Evita'. One of those tracks, *I Can't Forget*, would remain unreleased, as would a Patrick Leonard contribution, *You'll Stay*. However, another collaboration with the latter, *Oh Father*, would finally receive the single treatment and was released in the UK during the early part of 1996. Overlooked in favour of *Dear Jessie* back in 1989, Madonna had been persuaded to film a video for the song by David Fincher, despite her not feeling it was quite right for the radio. Indeed, it only reached No. 20 on the Billboard Hot 100 and sadly on its eventual mid-'90s release, it didn't perform much better, reaching only No. 16.

But the album certainly didn't harm Madonna's reputation as a singer and songwriter, and paved the way for her upcoming appearance in the long-awaited movie version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical.

Taking its revised title from an 'I'm Breathless' album track, 'Something To Remember' would feature pictures by Peruvian photographer Mario Testino, which were originally shot for a Versace fashion campaign in July. Additional flower illustrations were also included on the single cover for *You'll See*.

WORDS EDWARD RUSSELL, JONATHAN PRYCE & PETER FALLOON **PHOTO** ALBERTO TOLOT

Feelin' festive

Begin again

Celebrating the spirit of the season, **Andrea Corr** opens up about the heart and soul behind her latest solo LP, 'The Christmas Album'.

Christmas has always been a special time of year in the Corr household.

"We had this record in our family home and it was The Ray Conniff Singers," remembers Andrea Corr, who became an integral part of the holiday playlist with the release of her first festive LP, 'The Christmas Album', last year. "It was on vinyl and I loved it so much that daddy used to play it all day, every day. We had these big green velvet curtains and he would close them in the summer and put it on for me, and I would believe it was Christmas."

The record, she recalls, featured a selection of jolly and upbeat festive tunes, along with hymns and carols that showcased a different side to the season - one that she was reminded of four years ago, when invited to visit Dublin's Our Lady's Hospice And Care Services in Harold's Cross to sing a selection of her personal Christmas favourites.

It was that experience, Andrea says, that inspired her to record what would become her latest solo release. "At the event, people buy a light and while I sang the Christmas carols on this dark winter night, they held their lights up to those that they were missing," she shares. "I found that really moving because we're all united in our loss and there's something about Christmas where we're all supposed to be happy, but at the same time there's a lot of sadness. So instead of pretending we're not missing somebody, I find it healthier and much nicer to register and embrace that feeling."

It's a notion that resonates with Andrea, whose mother Jean passed away when the singer was just 25 years old. "Daddy used to say, only after mum passed away, that he found Christmas to be a time of absences," she says of her late father, Gerry, who died in 2015.

"When I was young, *O Holy Night* used to be the carol that I sang with dad and he played it on the organ. He used to play at mass every week and then on Christmas Day he played also. One year, he asked me, 'Pandy (he used to call me Pandy), would you think about singing it this year with me?' And I said, 'Yes, I will.' But when it got to Christmas Day, I was overwhelmed with fear of it, before the heads at the church and the whole congregation, and I couldn't do it.

"I remember mummy consoling me and they let me off the hook very gently, but then I very much remember myself sitting there in the pew and the introductory notes of *O Holy Night* coming in and hearing me not singing it, if you know what I mean? I kind of regretted it and daddy would always say through the years, 'Oh Pandy, you wouldn't sing *O Holy Night* with me.' So I'm singing it now and in some ways I feel that he hears it. And on that night, it felt particularly poignant with everybody thinking of somebody that was important to them."

Clocking in at 11 tracks, 'The Christmas Album' includes 10 cover versions along with the original recording, *Begin Again*. Also featured is Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood, who lends vocals on a rendition of *Blue Christmas*.

The pair met when The Corrs performed alongside the rock group and have kept in touch ever since. "I decided I wanted a partner for *Blue Christmas* and I thought of Ronnie. So I texted him and said, 'Give me a call,' and he said, 'Yeah, OK'. So we sent him over the track and he recorded his part in his hotel bedroom!"

'The Christmas Album' is Andrea's first outing in over a decade and, while The Corrs have put out two studio sets in that time, is this a return to her solo career, 15 years after her brilliant debut, 'Ten Feet High'? "It's been a long time," she laughs. "But there's no pre-thought about anything in terms of, 'What will I do next year...'"

She adds: "But when I don't sing, I release how much I actually love it. I love singing other people's songs because there's a freedom about singing a song that isn't your own. I think I'm quite scarred from the past, which was like, 'Where's the hit?' But I'm really proud of [my solo albums] - even if some of those songs were a bit avant garde for what people expected from a Corrs singer!"

She's referring to her 2007 debut,

> ***There's something about Christmas where we're all supposed to be happy, but at the same time there's a lot of sadness***

PHOTO KIP CARROLL

'Ten Feet High'; a collaboration with Nellee Hooper that was met with critical acclaim but failed to live up to commercial expectations. However, Andrea insists: "Nellee Hooper was just a hero to me. It probably wasn't as embraced [as the label expected] but I don't have regrets. I'm really happy with the work and that's the most important thing."

In addition to her musical career, Andrea has also enjoyed success on the big screen, appearing in 'The Commitments' (1991) and 'The Boys and Girl from County Clare' (2003), and alongside Madonna in 'Evita' (1996). At the time, The Corrs were enjoying their first taste of success and, looking back, she admits the rock and roll lifestyle didn't quite align with her side-job as an actress and almost had director Alan Parker in tears.

"When I auditioned to play the part, I wore a white dress and had very long hair," she recalls. "Then, [The Corrs] went on the road and that's when I found out I'd got the part - and I was overjoyed. So we continued on the road and I chopped all my hair off, which is a total novice thing to do. Actors don't do that, but singers do!"

Recalling Parker's reaction, she adds: "When I walked onto the set in Budapest, he nearly started crying. It was this choppy mess so I had to wear a wig, and every time he would see me he would say, '[Sighs] That fucking wig!'."

This year saw, Andrea reunite with her siblings as The Corrs headed Down Under for a tour with Natalie Imbruglia, Toni Childs and Germein, which closed out a festive chapter in her career that had been three years in the making. She reflects: "I'm so happy with the record and I hope that it brings the spirit of Christmas into people's homes. If it brings some joy and reflection, I'm happy." **RP**

● ***'The Christmas Album' is out now on EastWest.***

Feelin' festive

CHER
CHRISTMAS
★★★★☆

RELEASED: **October 20**
Warner
FORMATS: **CD, CD (Magazine Edition), 1LP Ruby Red Vinyl**

In a career spanning 60 years, Cher has ticked off more milestones than most, but it's taken six decades for her to fully embrace the holidays and release her first festive album.

In that time the superstar has shown her affinity for the season; in the '70s there were a series of Sonny & Cher Christmas specials and back in the late '90s, she joined Rosie O'Donnell on a recording of *Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)*.

Back in 1963, Cher performed backing vocals on the original with Darlene Love and for her latest body of work, Love returns the favour for a powerhouse duet of the tune that sees the pair in fine voice.

She's one of a number of collaborators, including Stevie Wonder – who lends vocals and harmonica to a joyous version of *What Christmas Means To Me* – while Cyndi Lauper finally hops on a recording with the Goddess Of Pop for a riotous rendition of *Put A Little Holiday In Your Heart*.

Lauper also contributes backing vocals to *Angels In The Snow*, one of four originals on the record, all typically Cher, and standouts that breathe life into the set. That song, along with the club-friendly opener *DJ Play A Christmas Song* – a genius first track that sets the scene for an LP where Cher throws out the Christmas album rulebook and places the focus on having a good time – are the most dance-oriented, while the Motown-inspired *Christmas Ain't Christmas Without You* and hip-hop leaning *Drop Top Sleigh Ride (feat. Tyga)* add to her musical toy box.

'There won't be no silent night / Turn it up it's a vibe / It's Christmas' she sings on the latter, with a suitably tongue-in-cheek contribution from the rapper: *'Throwin' money to the chandelier / Yeah, I make it rain, dear'*.

There's the occasional misstep; a reworked *Home* with Michael Bublé is less a winter warmer and more an ill-judged vehicle to shoehorn him into the set – and clocking in as the longest track on the album between two feelgood originals, something of a vibe-killer – while *Santa Baby* is a little out of place on an album that largely avoids the obvious holiday staples.

Come the closing number, a cover of The Zombies' *This Will Be Our Year*, however, those shortcomings are forgiven and the overall effect is one of joy and warmth that has you reaching for a snowball and soaking up the holiday cheer.

Overwhelmingly festive and quintessentially Cher – there's a new Queen Of Christmas in town!

PHOTO AN LE

tv+

HANNAH WADDINGHAM

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

QUICK READ

THAT'S LIFE!

Take That's journey has been defined by constant evolution but on their ninth album, the trio deliver their most confident work yet!

More than three decades into their musical journey, the face of Take That has changed numerous times over the years.

From their 1990 launch, the Fab Five - Gary Barlow, Mark Owen, Robbie Williams, Howard Donald and Jason Orange - spent half a decade wowing hordes of teen fans with hits like *Pray*, *It Only Takes A Minute*, *Relight My Fire*, *Back For Good* and *Never Forget*, but Robbie's departure marked the beginning of the end for the group, who announced their split less than 12 months later.

Fast forward 10 years, however, and the remaining four reconvened, picking up where they left off for two albums - 'Beautiful World' (2006) and 'The Circus' (2008) - before he rejoined in 2010 for 'Progress', the final LP from the original line-up to date.

His subsequent departure also saw Jason exit, paving the way for Gary, Mark and Howard to continue the band as a trio - a challenge they embraced wholeheartedly. "It's not only the audience we want to keep guessing, we want to keep things interesting for ourselves as well," says Gary.

For their latest album, 'This Life', Take That strip away the usual stadium-sized spectacle (over the decades, they've sold out plenty) and replace it with something more intimate but equally as ambitious; a sound touched upon when Mark visited Gary in London, having just agreed to headline BST Hyde Park over the summer, and had a vision of the band walking out onstage at sunset, singing something euphoric and warm.

"Whichever shape the band has taken, it always sounds like Take That when we all sing on it. I wanted to lean into that," he reflects, comparing his vision to a "scruffy version of The Three Tenors".

Gary had been working on something that fit the vibe perfectly and when he showed him the start of *Windows* - the lead single from the record - they set about finishing the track the same day. "It was about that feeling of getting back together as a band, and heading back out into the world again," he explains.

> **IT FEELS LIKE NEW THINGS ARE ON THE HORIZON AND HOPEFULLY THIS ALBUM WILL OPEN EVEN MORE DOORS FOR US**
>
> **GARY BARLOW**

"It has that feeling of spreading your wings, letting out the old and bringing in the new," adds Howard, with Mark reflecting: "It sounded beautiful, fresh and exciting. Similar to *Patience*, it just seemed like a great track to come back with. To have a song that can carry the weight of our history and feel like it deserves to be heard, that's very special. Every conversation about the album became a lot easier after that."

Despite entering uncharted waters "it was never painful making this album," continues Gary: "I hope it's just good times from here on out."

Recording started in Nashville's Historic RCA Studios A with nine-time Grammy winner Dave Cobb and ended in New York, via Savannah, Los Angeles, London and Barcelona, with Jennifer Decilveo also on production duties. "Making this record has been a delicate process," continues Mark, with Gary calling the end result "a real celebration of the three of us". "I know people call us a boy band or a man band but really, we're a vocal harmony group," he adds.

"'This Life' is about the twists, the turns and the adventure of living," he continues, with the title track written after his son graduated university: "That's when it really hit us that he wasn't a kid any longer."

What's an unwavering constant for the trio, however, is the bond that keeps

Take That (l-r): Mark Owen, Howard Donald and Gary Barlow

Take That united. "There's a sense of togetherness with this record, whether that's us coming back together as a band or people wanting connection in their own lives," insists Mark. "After the past few years, where we've endured a pandemic and not been working on music together, it's asking, 'How do we come together? How do we carry on, as a band and in general?'"

"There's a real strength in numbers," reflects Gary. "A lot of this record is about being supported and feeling more confident in, amongst and around each other. Our audience is like that as well. There's a whole universe around us."

Days I Hate Myself is a love-letter to that long-standing relationship. "Sometimes you're not feeling great but you walk out onstage and this wonderful audience wraps their arms around you. They pick you up and I wanted a song that they knew was about them," muses Gary.

The band's history precedes them, but while others may be compelled to kick back and tour the same greatest hits over and over, all three are set on driving into the future with the same creativity that's afforded them years of success to date.

"We want to push forward," says Gary. "We're still too ambitious to give into catalogue at this point." It's hardly surprising, given the scope of their upcoming tour; in addition to the usual run of UK shows in the spring (a 29-date UK and Ireland tour quickly snowballed into 41 dates due to overwhelming demand), the band are headed to Europe for an outdoor concert series next summer.

"Doors are opening for us and who knows where they're going to go," says Gary, excited about this new chapter for Take That. "It feels like new things are on the horizon and hopefully this album will open even more doors for us."

"There is a life in doing the same thing for a bit, but I want to be doing this when I'm 70," adds Mark. "If we were just repeating what we've done before, every year we'd just be a worse version of the band. 'This Life' feels new. It's a brave record for us to make, but I don't think there's any other way if we want to carry on". *"It just feels right,"* says Howard. **RP**

'This Life' is out now on EMI. Take That's 2024 tour launches April 13 in Sheffield.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

STEP BACK IN TIME

It's a nice day for a white wedding - but will they make it down the aisle?

Anyone know any good pop songs?

As the official **Stock Aitken Waterman** musical opens in Manchester, take a look at the larger-than-life stage show in action!

Careless talk and silly lies always come back to bite you

'I'd like to get off now, please'

The bridesmaids are sure to make a song and dance out of something

To be serenaded by the sweet sounds of SAW - the dream!

SONG LIST

1. *I Should Be So Lucky*
2. *Too Many Broken Hearts*
3. *Together Forever*
4. *Better Off Without You*
5. *Never Too Late*
6. *The Heaven I Need*
7. *If You Were With Me Now*
8. *He Ain't No Competition*
9. *You'll Never Stop Me Loving You*
10. *Respectable*
11. *Showin' Out (Get Fresh At The Weekend)*
12. *That's The Way It Is*
13. *Step Back In Time*
14. *Venus*
15. *You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)*
16. *Love In The First Degree*
17. *Toy Boy*
18. *Breakaway*
19. *Better The Devil You Know*
20. *In Another Place And Time*
21. *This Time I Know It's For Real*
22. *Telltale Signs*
23. *Especially For You*
24. *Never Gonna Give You Up*

● ***For full 'I Should Be So Lucky' UK dates, check our website.***

PHOTOS MARC BRENNER

The happiest day of their lives - what could possibly go wrong...

QUICK READ

PARTY UP!

Their initial chart run may have been cut short, but **D:Ream** are still going strong and - 30 years later - revisiting their classic hits with a new best-of LP!

For D:Ream, it only took *Things Can Only Get Better* for the band to be remembered for decades to come.

The dance-pop track has returned to the charts on no fewer than three occasions: first in 1992, when it reached No. 16, then a year later when it spent four weeks at No.1 - and again in 1997, when the Labour Party used the song as a theme during the party's successful campaign in the general election.

But there was far more to their output and the new hits collection, 'D:Ream: The Best Thing', showcases the breadth of their material, which has been remastered from the original 2" tapes for its latest release. Alongside the singles, it also includes unreleased live versions of tracks from their 1995 Shepherds Bush Empire gig, three unreleased demos - including the original instrumental version of *Things Can Only Get Better* - two newly-commissioned remixes from Mark Knight and Illyus & Barrientos, and unreleased remixes from the archive by Sasha, Leftfield, MK, Sure is Pure and Joy.

"We've been going for over 30 years now, and we've written a lot of songs," says singer Peter Cunnah. "But unlike many bands of a certain vintage, we've never just relied on the hits, and we've never stopped writing. Today, me and Al [McKenzie, bandmate] are batting at a much higher level than we ever did back in the day."

On the timing of the new release, he adds: "Well... 30 years is quite the anniversary, and everybody likes to celebrate an anniversary, right? Assembling all the tracks made us very aware of the passage of time. To go this long is an achievement, and we wanted to celebrate that. It's left us feeling nostalgic and proud but has also fuelled us to do more."

Having been adopted at a young age, Cunnah didn't meet his birth mother - about whom he knew nothing - until his early 20s, just as his band was taking off. He attributes "a prohibition about children born out of wedlock" to the situation, admitting that while his adopted family were not musical themselves, meeting his birth mother proved revelatory for him.

"She told me that she'd been the lead singer in a band, and that my father had been a trumpet and guitar player," he smiles. "That was like a baseball bat to my head, and it was affirmation, too, of the person I'd become. There are always nature versus nurture arguments, but with me a lot of it must have been nature, right? Turns out I had music in me all along..."

His first band, Tie The Boy, had been signed to U2's label, Mother Records, in the late 1980s but as he developed a penchant for dance music, the group went their separate ways and he decamped from Dublin to London, where he met McKenzie, a dance music head obsessed with old soul, and the two of them clicked.

"I never thought I'd be in a band," says McKenzie, "I just liked playing

D:Ream (l-r): Peter Cunnah, Al McKenzie

music, but there was this instant connection between me and Pete. The first thing we did together was *U R The Best Thing*."

That became their first hit, reaching No. 19 in 1992, with the club scene of the time and the hits that soundtracked it informing their direction going forward. "There were all these great-sounding records around at the beginning of the 1990s, all using loops," he continues. "I wanted that, and Alan, who knows his dance music, introduced me to the benefits of having a kick drum running 32 bars in a song to give the DJ something to lock on to, making it easier to crossfade."

> **I ALWAYS KNEW THAT THINGS... WOULD BE A HIT RECORD, SO IT WAS HUGELY SATISFYING WHEN IT WENT TO NO. 1 AND THEN SEEMED TO HANG AROUND THE CHARTS FOREVER.**
>
> **AL MCKENZIE**

They may have been late to the pre-Britpop music scene, but D:Ream soon came to define it. When *Things Can Only Get Better* crossed from the dance floor to Radio 1, helping the group achieve pop star status and taking them to arena stages across the country, with future TV physicist Brian Cox on keyboards while they played as support for Take That.

Cunnah thrived in his new role, McKenzie less so. "I always knew that *Things*... would be a hit record," says the latter, "so it was hugely satisfying when it went to No. 1 and then seemed to hang around the charts forever. But after a while I got sick of it all. I didn't like being part of the pop machine. I just wanted to make tunes and have a laugh."

And so McKenzie and Cunnah went their separate ways following their debut album, 'D:Ream On Volume One', in 1993. Peter continued as D:Ream and recorded the follow-up, 1995's 'World', without Alan, and they stayed apart for 15 years before reconvening in 2008 and realising they were better together than apart.

"We still had that connection," Cunnah says, "and now we were working together more closely, a much more 50-50 split. It's helped us enormously and made us a better band."

They've released two further albums - 'In Memory Of' (2011) and 'Open Hearts Open Minds' (2021) - with a third in the making, as they continue to tour. "We love playing the hits, it's always so much fun to bring so much joy, but for us it's very much about the new music," Cunnah says. "Compiling the greatest hits really did fuel our creativity. Making new music doesn't just give us a sense of purpose, it helps make the world make sense. Having been going for 30 years now, we'd like to continue for at least another 20 before AI comes along and takes over."

Of their drive to continue playing for fans, he adds: "There were a couple of times that the audience - oh my God. There was just so much energy, and I got hit by this wave of emotion coming from them. I lost my voice, tears started rolling down my face. I think that's what's so amazing about music, it puts people in the moment. That show reminded us just how much we love what we do, and how lucky we are to still do it. We've an army of loyal fans who are eager to hear everything we do, and we appreciate that." **RP**

● ***'D:Ream: The Best Thing' is out December 8 on New State Music.***

PHOTO SEAN McDONAGH

ROCKSTARS

Andrew Ridgeley paid tribute to his late Wham! bandmate, George Michael

Sheryl Crow also joined Willie Nelson, along with Chris Stapleton and Dave Matthews

Missy Elliott became the first female rapper to be inducted

BERNIE TAUPIN

Elton John celebrated songwriting partner Bernie Taupin, while Big Boi inducted Kate Bush

KATE BUSH

LL Cool J thanked DJ Kool Herc for keeping the hip-hop fire “blazing”

SIA joined Chaka Khan on the classic *I'm Every Woman*

Chaka also welcomed Rufus bandmate Tony Maiden

Celebrating the Class Of 2023, revisit all the action from this year's **Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame** induction ceremony!

CLASS OF 2023

PERFORMERS

Kate Bush

Sheryl Crow

Missy Elliott

George Michael

Willie Nelson

Rage Against The Machine

The Spinners

MUSICAL INFLUENCE

DJ Kool Herc

Link Wray

AHMET ERTEGUN AWARD

Don Cornelius

AWARD FOR MUSICAL EXCELLENCE

Chaka Khan

Al Kooper

Bernie Taupin

Sheryl Crow welcomed Peter Frampton and Stevie Nicks to the stage for her set

Soul Train creator Don Cornelius was a posthumous inductee

PHOTOS DISNEY_ MICHAEL J. LE BRECHT II_ JENNIFER POTTHEISER_ DEREK BLANKS FOR MISSY ELLIOTT

QUICK READ

SHADOW SELVES

Having secured the group their highest UK chart placement in decades, **Suede** return this month with an expanded version of their latest LP, 'Autofiction'!

With a career spanning more than three decades, Suede have left an indelible mark on the music over the course of nine albums and countless hits, but it was with a punk mindset that they initially embarked upon the creative process for 'Autofiction'.

Released last September, the LP was conceived as the band started rehearsing some of the most punchy and direct songs of their career for their live shows, after which they decided to go back to basics and approach the project as a new band, working together for the first time.

And so Brett Anderson, Mat Osman, Simon Gilbert, Richard Oakes and Neil Codling schlepped to a rehearsal studio in deserted Kings Cross to collect a key, set up and start playing. "We didn't want to make increasingly cerebral music," Anderson says. "[Previous release] 'The Blue Hour' is a little more wilfully obscure, which is brilliant as it gives you somewhere to come back from."

> **'AUTOFICTION' HAS A NATURAL FRESHNESS, IT'S WHERE WE WANT TO BE...**
>
> **BRETT ANDERSON**

That 2018 album saw them at their most experimental yet, with field recordings, spoken word and instrumental interstitials part of the palette. But Suede's initial aim for their ninth studio album was to create something that replicated the power of the band live, something that they feel they hadn't managed over the course of their 30-year career.

"There's a weird inertia in the studio, so often it becomes about the microscopic, the technicality and the musicality, and I really wanted to push that out of the way," Anderson explains. "It was an attempt to get all of the shit and the noise and the naivety of being a live band, and try and capture that."

They initially planned to take the 'back to basics' idea to an extreme by playing gigs under a fake name, or by inviting a few fans to the studio and hammering through a set of brand-new songs with the tape running. But as time passed, the initial album was shelved and new material kept emerging. While on 'Night Thoughts' (2016) and 'The Blue Hour', sessions had been created by Osman and Anderson heading to Codling's house to write around the kitchen table, 'Autofiction' saw a return to solitary working. "By now Neil and I know instinctively what is going to inspire Brett, and what he's going to hate," he says, with the early writing on 'Autofiction' delivering *She Still Leads Me On*, a song from Brett to his late mother, which reconfigured what the record could be.

"When Suede do exuberant it tends to be more towards the primal," says Oakes. "The world had just stopped and yet we were able to write something joyous and hopeful".

With more new songs like *Shadow Self* and *Turn Off Your Brain And Yell*, Suede entered The Kinks' Konk studio

Suede (l-r): Simon Gilbert, Richard Oakes, Brett Anderson, Mat Osman, Neil Codling

PHOTO DEAN CHALKLEY

in north London with long-time collaborator Ed Buller as producer. "We went back to Ed because we wanted to get close to that early sound of the band when we were less sophisticated with recording, and he's totally used to that," says Osman. "He has this enthusiasm if he's really into something, and gets all these energetic ideas," Oakes adds, "to have him get excited about songs like *15 Again* and *She Still Leads Me On* in the way that he was when he first heard *Beautiful Ones* is fantastic".

In the studio, Suede didn't play to a click track, instead trying to make the sessions feel as 'live' as possible, imagining themselves in a gig setting where, as Oakes puts it, "if you made a mistake you wouldn't stop and say, 'Hang on, can we try this again?' - you'd just plough on".

The scruffy intimacy of the studio meant that the original plans to record live or in front of fans were, in the end, not missed. "The songs are quite thrashy so they're just exciting to play," says Osman. "Sometimes, when you're recording, songs become like a puzzle to be solved, and it never felt like that; it was about getting the best performance of it. It's a very physical record – the last couple have been quite cerebral and emotional and this one is a blast of noise. Every few years you want that thrill of making an up-beat, rock and roll record."

While 'Night Thoughts' and 'The Blue Hour' explored the anxieties and worries of becoming a parent, 'Autofiction' is one of Anderson's most personal records yet. Reflecting on the process of writing the memoirs 'Coal Black Mornings' and 'Afternoons With The Blinds Drawn', he says: "'Afternoons With The Blinds Drawn' was very much about exploring the Brett Anderson persona, and recognising it. I found it fascinating to write because I was delving into a lot of the things like that that I possibly hadn't confronted at the time.

"It was really interesting finding out about all these mental mechanisms that happen when you're in a band. I tried to write it as a really honest critique of what happened to me, going through that machinery of fame," he continues, admitting the personal struggle of reaching a half century was also key to his songwriting. "I've found my 50s quite hard so far, I don't feel young any more, I have a lot more hang-ups.

"I don't want to get into some sort of victim nonsense, but the 50s feel like quite a change from the 40s. I still felt young in my 40s and I suppose I wanted to explore some of that anxiety. Songs like *Personality Disorder* and *Shadow Self*, they're looking into the darker side of what it is to be a 50-year-old person."

Time may have passed but when it comes to the band's driving force, it's the same as it always was; a group of people living off the raw sensation of making a racket in a room. "When we were rehearsing and writing this record and playing things like *15 Again* it was this sheer, physical rush. It reminded me of [early Suede B-Side] *Painted People* or something, that thing where you're hanging on for dear life," says Osman. "There's a lot to be said for, every now and then, just resetting yourself, and reminding yourself what is so great about being in a band."

"It does feel like a new page to me," adds Anderson. "I always thought of the first three records as a trilogy in a way, and the last three too. 'Autofiction' has a natural freshness, it's where we want to be..." **RP**

● ***'Autofiction (Expanded)' is out December 8 on BMG.***

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THU 14 ***NOTTINGHAM*** ROCK CITY
FRI 15 ***CARDIFF*** TRAMSHED
THU 21 ***BRISTOL*** O2 ACADEMY
FRI 22 ***OXFORD*** O2 ACADEMY
SAT 23 ***BEXHILL*** DE LA WARR PAVILION
THU 28 ***NEWCASTLE*** BOILERSHOP
FRI 29 ***GLASGOW*** GARAGE
SAT 30 ***DUBLIN*** ACADEMY

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'TOMORROW'S HERE TODAY'
GREATEST HITS ALBUM OUT 4TH OCTOBER 2024

BEST OF 2023

As the year comes to a close, we count down **RETROPOP**'s favourite releases from the past 12 months!

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BEST OF 2023

It's time to look back and celebrate a stellar year in pop. First up, albums...

1 ALISON GOLDFRAPP THE LOVE INVENTION *(BMG)*

For more than two decades, Alison Goldfrapp helped her namesake duo become one of the most successful synth-pop acts ever, but in stepping away from familiarity and connecting with Richard X and James Greenwood, she delivered a defining record in her near-30-year career with 'The Love Invention'.

Opening with the single *NeverStop*, 'The Love Invention' is heavy with synthesisers and electronic beats, over which Alison's distinctive breathy vocals inject a sense of wide-eyed wonder.

While much of the album is made for the clubs, there's a vibrancy to the material that radiates across the set, with *So Hard So Hot* conjuring the sweat-soaked atmosphere of summer festival raves while reaching into nocturnal darkness.

It's a dichotomy seen in the alternative versions of *Digging Deeper Now* and *Fever*, which first appeared in remixed form, courtesy of Claptone and Paul Woolford, respectively, but are included on the standard tracklist in their original configurations as electro-pop numbers as opposed to headier moments. While both are laden with intensified beats, the production of the original versions is perfection - a standard that's held across the entirety of 'The Love Invention' - to the point where the amped-up mixes occasionally feel under-produced when compared to the nuanced arrangements on the album itself. And that's not to mention the also-fantastic 'Love Reinvention' remix project!

From the productions and performances to the songs themselves, nothing about this album is spared, but at its core 'The Love Invention' is a pop record that implores you to surrender to the music and embrace the moment - right now - and earns **RETROPOP**'s Album Of The Year 2023.

2 EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL FUSE *(Virgin)*

More than two decades since they last released an album, Everything But The Girl's 'Fuse' had plenty of hype to live up to - and on all fronts it delivered.

From the opening electronic beats of lead release *Nothing Left To Lose* - a garage-influenced comeback that harks back to the sounds dominating the charts when EBTG last released music, carried by Tracey Thorn's distinctive vocals that, in evoking a simpler time, generate an undeniable melancholy - it's clear that she and Ben Watt remain at the peak of their powers.

Running through the songs is an innate sense of nostalgia, whether '80s-referencing synths on *No One Knows We're Dancing* or ideas on the passing of time on *Forever*, but calls to the past are far from a gimmick; they're apt reflections on the place Ben and Tracey find themselves in, more than 20 years after their last collaborative album, recapturing the magic of the past for the world today.

But what shines through is the duo's innovation and drive not to create something obvious; they could have quite easily taken the commercial path and put out *Missing Pt. 2*, but instead they sought out a new sound that picks up where they left off in 1999, refined for the more mature subject matter of their lyrics.

By all accounts a standout album not only of 2023, but of their career to date.

PHOTO EDWARD BISHOP

PHOTO MAT MAITLAND

PHOTO ED MILES

3 OMD BAUHAUS STAIRCASE *(100%)*

Following up one of their most acclaimed releases was never going to be easy, but Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark's 14th album holds up among the finest work of their 45-year history.

If the opening track and title song is among the record's more abstract offerings, follow-up *Anthropocene* plainly explores our impact on the world over one of the record's most infectious dance tracks.

Its sister song, *Evolution Of Species*, picks things up later on down the line, this time with a more ominous instrumentation, but across the album the duo showcases what they do best; combining classic pop hooks with direct, often devastating, lyrics.

And the more pointed the subject matter, the more infectious the track; venturing into political pop territory, *Kleptocracy* calls out corruption at the top over one of the album's most danceable tunes, while *Don't Go* - originally released in 2019 from the band's singles collection, 'Souvenir' - follows a similar formula with a more personal narrative.

There are exceptions; a spiky industrial instrumental underpins *Slow Train*, a different beast for OMD, while the pulsing *G.E.M.* showcases a darker side to the duo. A pair of ballads, *Veruschka* and *Healing*, strip everything back and place their melodies, lyrics and vocals front and centre.

A standout LP in itself - the fact it arrives more than four decades into OMD's record-releasing career is even more impressive.

PHOTO DAMON BAKER

4 JAKE SHEARS LAST MAN DANCING *(Mute)*

On his second solo album and first in five years, Jake Shears brought the party with a non-stop run of disco and house-influenced dance smashes.

Opening song and lead single, *Too Much Music*, is a strong indicator of the material across the album, which progresses like a night out from feelgood pop through to late night, heady club anthems.

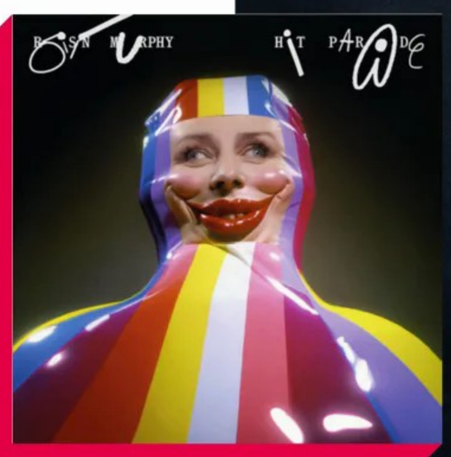
Of the former, *I Used To Be In Love* is straightforward disco euphoria that positions Jake's distinctive falsetto at the fore and *Really Big Deal* is an indulgent romp that sees him strut the floor and take ownership of the space. Meanwhile, the title song has echoes of ABBA and a nostalgic '70s vibe that wouldn't sound out of place on the Scissor Sisters' early albums.

Marking a turning point with *8 Ball*, the techno *Mess Of Me* leads to an extended instrumental section, throughout which Jake is largely absent and lets the music do the talking.

Guest appearances add to the club feel of the set, with Kylie Minogue collaboration *Voices* a centrepoint on 'Last Man Dancing' and a welcome reunion for the pop icons, while Amber Martin's powerhouse vocal on *Devil Came Down The Dancefloor* adds a new dimension to the record.

Closing with a spoken word outro that sees Iggy Pop sharing his musical wisdom, it's a choice move that on one hand embodies everything Jake sets out to achieve this time around, while also (quite brilliantly) channelling the drunken philosophy one might encounter at the smoking area in the early hours after a few too many tequilas.

5 RÓISÍN MURPHY HIT PARADE *(Ninja Tune)*



Delivering her most diverse and captivating work to date, Róisín Murphy's 'Hit Parade' conjured a sonic wonderland of creative possibilities.

Trip-hop influences run through the opening number, *What Not To Do*, leading into the breezy lead single, *CooCool*. *The Universe* is similarly wistful with a laid-back charm that Murphy executes with ease, yet never appearing disengaged, while layered, enchanting vocals on the verses of *Fader* juxtapose the semi-spoken chorus, underpinned by electric guitar tones and a steady bassline.

Played front-to-back, 'Hit Parade' journeys from laid back ambience through electronic euphoria before arriving at avant garde experimentation, offering nods towards her most commercial releases while veering distinctly away from the realms of chart fodder and into a kaleidoscopic world of experimentation.

Hurtz So Bad features pulsing synths and augmented vocals over hypnotic beats, with the run from *Free Will* through *Can't Replicate* best representing her dance floor sensibilities, all clocking in around the seven-minute mark and showcasing a knack for sustaining an audience over extended beats like only Murphy can.

Overwhelming for some, therein lies the brilliance of 'Hit Parade' - that even in its wildest moments, it speaks to the artist at its core, showcasing her command over her work and instantly becoming an essential Róisín Murphy album.

PHOTO NIK PATE

6 RICK ASTLEY ARE WE THERE YET? *(BMG)*

Back after five years with a new album and a new sound, 'Are We There Yet?' saw Rick Astley revitalised and renewed.

Inspired by a massive US tour, the resulting LP takes a direction that perfectly compliments Astley's distinctive vocals, be it on mid-tempo guitar-led numbers like *Letting Go* and *Golden Hour*, or more R&B-leaning tunes in the vein of *Never Gonna Stop* and *Waterfall*.

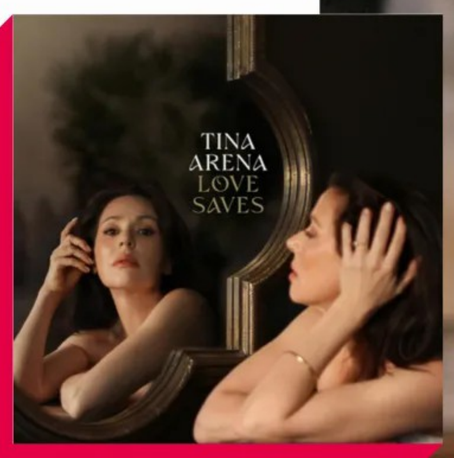
Those influences are particularly pronounced on moments such as *Forever And More*, *Maria Love* and *Take Me Back To Your Place*, all of which nod towards the classic Motown era, with neat horn arrangements and layered backing vocals adding to that classic feeling.

For a singer so renowned for classic pop moments, 'Are We There Yet?' sees Astley steer his own ship and take his career down an avenue that's most fulfilling to him; an ethos he's adopted for the past decade and one that's already seen him return to the top of the charts and reclaim his status as a British pop legend.

In recent years, he's earned new fans by dipping his feet into rock territory, working with Blossoms on their tribute show to The Smiths and performing with Foo Fighters, projects that on paper seem worlds away from classic Rick Astley but that, in reality, have all led to this point and the release of, what is without question, some of his finest work since the 1980s.

PHOTO PETER NEILL

7 TINA ARENA LOVE SAVES *(Positive Dream)*



Eight years after releasing her most recent English-language record, Tina Arena returned in fine form on 'Love Saves' - her most personal body of work to date.

'I forgive you / For everything' she sings in the opening of *Church* - the first single to be released from the album and a plainly written ode to heartbreak, forgiveness and ultimately redemption.

Journeying through the 11 song tracklist - 10 in English and the French-language version of *Dancing On Thin Ice* that closes the record - the singer-songwriter sets free her emotions, from desperation (*Cry Me A Miracle*) and frustration (*Can't Say Anything*), to pure rage (*Devil In Me*), this is Tina Arena like we've never seen her before.

But in riding the emotional rollercoaster there's a sense of catharsis and come closing tracks *House* and the title song, *Love Saves*, her therapy comes full circle and the record closes with a sense of light relief that reflects the artist now, having found love and returned to happiness.

It's without question a breakup album, but through the whirlwind of emotions channelled into each second of the record is a yearning for happiness and strive towards the future that makes for what, in years to come, will be regarded as a seminal moment in her repertoire.

PHOTO KIDD SAUVE

PHOTO JULIAN BROAD

8 BEVERLEY KNIGHT THE FIFTH CHAPTER *(BMG)*

As she embraced a new era in her personal life, British soul sensation Beverley Knight made a bold career move and returned to pop with a spectacular new sound.

Launching with its lead single, *Last One On My Mind* is a fierce disco anthem that brings the singer-turned-stage star back to the fore and proves that, more than 25 years since her chart debut, she remains hot property.

The One I'm Gonna Love is a fierce slice of funk-influenced R&B, while pre-release track *Systematic Overload* is somewhere between Nile Rodgers and Prince, with a massive singalong chorus that's instantly iconic.

Featured on three tracks are the London Community Gospel Choir, who elevate moments like the building gospel epic *Cold World*, playful *I'm On Fire* and massive disco anthem *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*, featuring Mark Knight on production duties.

But across 11 tracks, Beverley proves she can absolutely hold her own; take the opening belt of *Someone Else's Problem*, a move few would be brave enough to attempt, nevermind task themselves to follow-up over the remaining three-minutes of the track. Meanwhile, the electro-pop showcase that is *Queen Of Everything* - a feelgood offering that wouldn't sound out of place on the soundtrack to Ryan Murphy's 'Pose' and is almost guaranteed a lip sync spot on 'RuPaul's Drag Race' - shows she knows how to have a good time without relying on the vocal acrobatics she's best known for.

A superb return.

9 CORINNE BAILEY RAE
BLACK RAINBOWS *(Thirty Tigers)*

Veering away from R&B and soul in favour of a bold new direction, Corinne Bailey Rae made a statement with her epic fourth album.

'Black Rainbows' is inspired by the objects and artworks collected by Theaster Gates at the Stony Island Arts Bank in Chicago, with the work including a collection of songs, the book 'Refraction/Reflection Of The Arts Bank' as photographed by Koto Bolofo, live performances, visuals, lectures and exhibitions.

Leading the record is the track *New York Transit Queen*; a post-punk glam extravaganza, clocking in at just 1.49 and turning on its head everything that's come to define a lead single. Instead, the track spotlights Miss New York Transit 1954, Audrey Smaltz, a Black pioneer who rose through the fashion world and whose winning photograph piqued Corinne's attention.

It's one of a range of subject matters on the record, which spans themes from the rock hewn churches of Ethiopia to to the journeys of Black Pioneers westward.

A concept piece at its core, her latest work is a far cry from those commercial pop records of the mid-2000s and spans a spectrum of genres. Opener *A Spell, A Prayer* begins much like the neo soul of her previous releases before building to a trippy, psychedelic soundscape that proves enchanting, while *Erasure* conjures its title by distorting her vocals with white noise, leaving the listener no choice but to pay close attention.

With an overwhelming air of mystery, *He Will Follow You With His Eyes* explores how Blackness is often seen as 'other' under the white gaze, to the point of fetishization in its closing moments; heavy hitting themes that are woven into the narrative of each track and, much like the artworks that backdrop the LP, unravel within a wider context, for a project that speaks of a musician connecting with her culture and heritage on a deeper level.

10 KYLIE MINOGUE
TENSION *(BMG)*

Three years since the release of her record-breaking 15th album, 'DISCO', Kylie Minogue broke the tension by unleashing its long-awaited follow-up.

Spearheaded by the global phenomenon that is lead single *Padam Padam*, the 11-track LP is an unashamed celebration of pop that transcends genre boundaries and chart trends and sees the Aussie icon let loose like never before.

Closest to the Top 10 opener is the title song, *Tension* - an equally-sensual electro-pop stormer underpinned by pulsing beats - with the LP worlds away from concepts like 'Golden' or 'DISCO'.

Hold On To Now and *Vegas High* - a not-too-subtle not to her Sin City residency debut - are soaring anthems destined to be live show staples, while *Things We Do For Love* and *You Still Get Me High* lean into an '80s synth soundscape that's unquestionably fresh with a knowing wink towards the era that launched her.

While *Green Light* is the closest to her most recent material and wouldn't sound out of place on Kylie's previous LP, *One More Time* channels mid-'00s pop while the sun soaked *Hands* is the closest we've come to a Kylie rap track - a blend that is, on paper, bonkers, but contrasted with a mid-tempo chorus layered with '90s-style R&B harmonies, works.

Closing track *Story* reads as an ode to all the Lovers that have backed the Aussie superstar throughout her career and have become, in her own words, *'part of my story'*.

As a whole, 'Tension' is a great pop record and a testament to Kylie's continued relevance and indisputable legacy as an all-time great.

PHOTO EDWARD COOKE

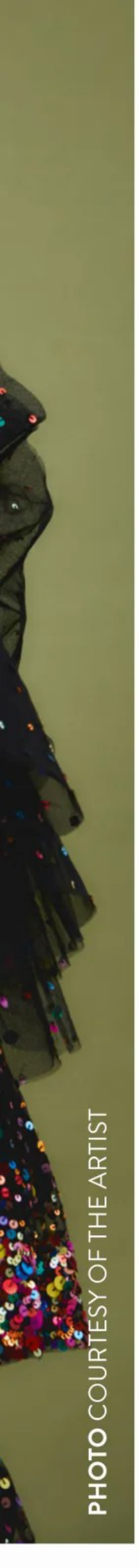


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

11 DEPECHE MODE
MEMENTO MORI *(Columbia)*

The 15th album from Depeche Mode and their first as a duo saw Dave Gahan and Martin Gore acknowledge their mortality in the wake of Andy Fletcher's passing.

Produced with a tight-knit group of collaborators, including producer James Ford, alongside The Psychedelic Furs' Richard Butler and co-producer Marta Salogni, lead single, *Ghosts Again*, is indicative of the introspective nature of much of the album, which becomes almost an obsession come its finale.

Enigmatic synths on *Wagging Tongue* are juxtaposed by the slick ballad, *Soul With Me*, highlighting Gahan's versatility and the various facets of the band's sound as it's evolved across the decades.

What hangs the project together is its concept and the resulting work is some of the band's strongest this century, bittersweet in the wake of Fletch's loss but a testament to Gahan and Gore's determination to bring the project - the title of which was set upon by the trio - into fruition.

At this stage in their careers, it would be easy for the group to kick back and take it easy, but 'Memento Mori' is absolute proof that, when working together, Depeche Mode's creativity is unwavering.

PHOTO ANTON CORBIJN

12 DOLLY PARTON
ROCKSTAR *(Butterfly)*

On the back of her induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, Dolly Parton ditched country in favour of her epic first rock album.

Clocking in at 30 songs with a selection of originals and cover versions, and huge line-up of big-name collaborators, it's her most ambitious project yet and a moment of personal triumph for the legendary musician.

Opening with the original title song, it establishes the performer as an aspiring rocker letting loose in her bedroom. It's a typically tongue-in-cheek approach for an album worlds away from hits like *Jolene*, *Coat Of Many Colors* and *9 To 5*, while maintaining the empowering essence of her lyrics and showcasing her still-phenomenal vocals at 77.

Listening to 'Rockstar' is like a fever dream; whether it's belting out The Police's *Every Breath You Take* with Sting, trading verses with Debbie Harry on Blondie's new wave classic *Heart Of Glass* or harmonising with Goddaughter Miley Cyrus on *Wrecking Ball*, it's an impressive feat that only Dolly could pull off.

Among the highlights, a gospel-influenced rendition of Prince's *Purple Rain* sees the superstar at her vocal best (and gives a glimpse at what the future may hold as she nods towards a full LP in the genre), while the Stevie Nicks original *What Has Rock And Roll Ever Done For You* - an outtake from the 'Rock A Little' (1986) / 'Tango In The Night' (1987) sessions - is a masterclass from two powerhouse performers.

She also delves into her personal catalogue, reimagining the folk-y *My Blue Tears* into a vast power ballad with Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon.

PHOTO BUTTERFLY

13 SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR
HANA *(Cooking Vinyl)*

After the longest break between albums of her career, Sophie Ellis-Bextor returned with her much-anticipated seventh record, 'HANA'.

The follow-up to 2016's 'Familia' reunites the singer-songwriter with collaborator Ed Harcourt, with whom she first worked on her fifth album, 'Wanderlust' (2014), and enlisted to help craft this, their third project together.

Setting itself aside from previous projects, opening track *A Thousand Orchids* is different to anything she's done before, juxtaposing pulsing synths with acoustic piano. The mid-tempo number builds to a stirring crescendo with lyrics that talk of letting go of the past and living in the moment - a subject present across the album, notably in the singles *Breaking The Circle* and *Lost In The Sunshine*.

As an album, 'HANA' is unique to the rest of Sophie's catalogue and while there are definite pop moments, she resists chasing hits and lets the music lead the way for a sound that's both charming and enchanting.

That not to say there aren't echoes of Sophie gone by: *Until The Wheels Fall Off* is a rollicking anthem for holding on to love *'through all the crazy times, through all the lows and highs'*, layered vocal harmonies mirror soaring synths on the bouncy *Beyond The Universe*, and the bombastic *Reflections* is future concert highlight.

Meanwhile, laid-back early cut *Tokyo* offers a moment of respite that forms a centrepiece for the album, bringing together its themes and placing Sophie's pure vocals front and centre.

PHOTO LAURA LEWIS

14 McFLY
POWER TO PLAY *(BMG)*

Having dabbled in synths on their last album, McFly took it back to what they do best with a bold collection of all-out guitar tunes on 'Power To Play'.

Echoing classics from their catalogue like *5 Colours In Her Hair* and *Obviously* - both of which turn 20 next year - the latest LP from the boys sees them turn up the volume and let loose on what's undoubtedly their most authentic album yet.

Opening the collection, it's an ode to the pop-punk days of the early-noughties and its impact on teens like McFly, who pose: *'Who's gonna play for the kids with long hair when nobody cares? / How will they cope with the pain?'*

Follow-up *Land Of The Bees* is similarly self-referential as the 'old' McFly announce their return, while *I'm Fine* is bursting with ironic angst and *God Of Rock & Roll* feeds into the themes of the LP for a classic stadium filler.

Bringing together inspirations from across the decades, the electronic verses on *Forever's Not Enough* lean into a lost era of late-'80s rock and roll when synths began to infiltrate the genre, while *Route 55* references the sounds of the '70s with a standout singalong chorus.

On closing track *Shine On*, they once again reach out with a reassuring mantra for standing proud and living life boldly and authentically - a sentiment reflected across an album that's unashamedly McFly.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

PHOTO MUNACHI OSEGBU

15 SPARKS THE GIRL IS CRYING IN HER LATTE *(Island)*

Returning to their original home of Island Records for the first time in more than four decades, Sparks delivered avant garde electronic excellence on their latest LP, 'The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte'.

The 26th album from the ever-prolific Los Angeles Mael brothers clocks in at 14 tracks and launches with its title song, which also serves as the record's lead single.

With an underpinning darkness and a brooding sense of urgency that builds throughout, it sets the tone for an album that explores a multitude of soundscapes, each of which exists within its own narrative, set at various places and times. *Veronica Lake* reverts to golden years of cinema with a hypnotic ode to the late silver screen icon, while *The Mona Lisa's Packing, Leaving Late Tonight* explores one's place in the world through the eyes of one of the most famous pieces of art in history.

More a series of paintings or vignettes than a collection of songs, every colour is mixed to precision and each brush stroke made with intent, whether it's to create a sense of urgency on the stirring *We Go Dancing* or the petulant defiance of *Nothing Is As Good As They Say It Is*.

Meanwhile, experimental moments like *Escalator* and *Take Me For A Ride* deviate from the traditional pop structure and showcase Sparks' enduring creativity that has sustained throughout their near-50-year career.

While that's an aspect of their craft that they take seriously, there are several moments of plain deadpan throughout 'The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte' - most notably closing track *Gee, That Was Fun*, which is delivered in straight monotone over drums and piano that perfectly embodies everything we so love about the duo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

16 ANDY TAYLOR MAN'S A WOLF TO MAN *(BMG)*

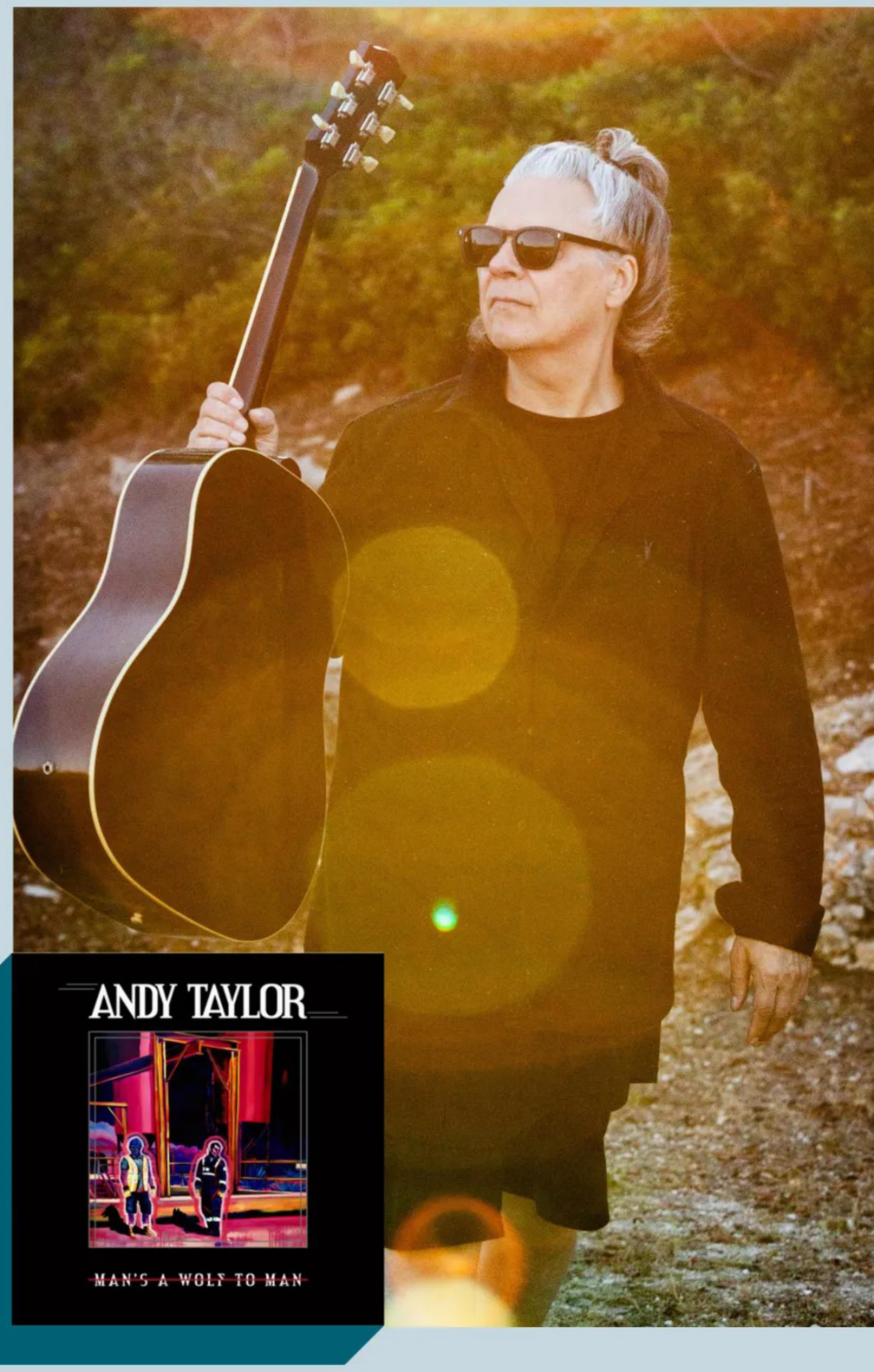
Back with his first solo album in over 30 years, Andy Taylor's 'Man's A Wolf To Man' offered a fine showcase of the Duran Duran legend's faultless musicianship.

The title song introduces a sonic landscape that's instantly evocative of his early solo efforts, his vocal largely unchanged and the raw edge of his unique brand of rock and roll symbolic of a time gone by, before technological advancements sanitised that classic sound.

A DIY project at its core, mostly conceived and recorded at his home studio in Ibiza, tracks like *Did It For You*, *Gettin' It Home* and *Gotta Give* bring a live sound to the album, with Taylor - whose vocal contributions to the record only grew as the recording process continued - sounding at one with the instrumentation.

Influential Blondes is an intentionally unpolished cut, channelling '90s guitar and grunge, with a distorted vocal that sounds fresh from a garage jam session - a good thing, it should be said - while *Reaching Out To You* is among the more idiosyncratic numbers, with spiky guitars and whirling electronics adding a new dimension to the record. *This Will Be Ours* could be a Traveling Wilburys tune.

On the flipside there's *Trying To Get Even*, a duet with Tina Arena and an early standout on the record, with the Aussie star not only pushing the guitarist's vocal capabilities to new limits, but their blend a perfect pairing that elevates the country-rock number to one of the finest moments on the collection.



17 SHANIA TWAIN QUEEN OF ME
(EMI)

Country pop royalty Shania Twain lived up to her legacy with her superb sixth album 'Queen Of Me'; an unapologetic celebration of living life on her own terms.

Launching with the infectious country romp *Giddy Up!*, Shania gets the party started like only she knows how, delivering powerful vocals and vowing to *'put some up in your giddy'*. Not only does it bring her sound full circle - the track wouldn't sound out of place on her classic 1997 record 'Come On Over' - it finally reintroduces her penchant for punctuation after a two-decade absence.

While referencing the past on the eighties-inspired *Waking Up Dreaming* and straight-up country pop *Not Just A Girl*, 'Queen Of Me' sees Shania work with producers including Stewart and Mark Ralph to incorporate electronic elements that elevate and modernise her sound.

It's a declaration she makes on *Brand New*, looking at everything that's gone before and insisting: *'You'll always be the same old you / But I'm a brand new me.'* The past is a territory she delves into from time to time; *Last Day Of Summer* sees her look back on a lost love, while closer *The Hardest Stone* is a mid-tempo number that reads as a sequel to her 2017 track *Poor Me*.

Meanwhile, the biggest revelation on the record is *Number One*; a euphoric, disco-inspired number and a celebration of love like nothing she's has attempted before. It's a triumph of a track that's quintessential Shania with its spoken *'Get the lights!'* while introducing a sound to be explored on future recordings.

PHOTO LOUIE BANKS

18 BLUR THE BALLAD OF DARREN
(Parlophone)

On their first album in eight years, Blur laid themselves bare across 10 tracks that cut to the core of the band's essence, channelling echoes of the past while reflecting the group as they stand today.

Its title song - which serves as the album opener - is a haunting introduction to a new era for the act and roots itself in the past, with a distinct yearning for times gone by in Albarn's vocal as he intones *'I met you at an early show... I fell in love with you'*.

Deceptively enchanting melodies permeate across the project on tracks like *Barbaric*, on which he poses *'At what cost, the feelings that we thought we'd never lose?'*, while *Russian Strings* sees him in the moment, pondering his only options: *'...turn the music up / I'm hitting the hard stuff'*.

PHOTO REUBEN BASTIENNE-LEWIS

But hand in hand with the melancholic nostalgia is also a collection of striking tunes that encompass the spectrum of Blur's creative output; *St. Charles Square* oozes swagger with a distinct art-pop flair, while lead single *The Narcissist* is evocative of the guitar-heavy '90s. Meanwhile, *Avalon* is strictly future-facing, with a focus on building towards better and striving for spiritual peace.

For more than 30 years Blur have continued to push the boundaries of their sound and that creativity extends to their latest project. This time around, they offer a body of work that's equally rooted in the past - with multiple nods to former glories subtly woven throughout - while establishing a place for the group in today's climate that remains current and appealing.

19 TAKE THAT
THIS LIFE *(EMI)*

On their first album in five years, Take That explored new stripped-back soundscapes that place their vocals front and centre.

The project - the ninth overall from the group - veers away from vast pop anthems that have become their forte in favour of understated, slow-burning numbers that highlight the trio's musicianship.

Lead single *Windows* is a strong indicator of what's on offer, more aligned with Gary Barlow and Mark Owen's solo material than that of Take That, though that's not necessarily a bad thing - just different.

The title track is a bouncy piano number, scaled back it bare bones with an instrumentation that reflects the subject matter and sees the boys' voices blend with lush harmonies. Although Barlow primarily takes the driver's seat, Owen leads highlights including the country-tinged *Time And Time Again* and the subdued *Brand New Sun*.

There are echoes of their catalogue; *We Got All Day* builds to a rapturous finale while closing number, *Where We Are*, is reminiscent of the band's pop anthems and sure to come to life on stage.

Holding the set together is Gary, Mark and Howard Donald who, more than three decades into the game, continue to drive forward and, in switching things up, deliver a genuinely interesting album from the boy band icons.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

20 MADNESS
THEATRE OF THE ABSURD PRESENTS
C'EST LA VIE *(BMG)*

Seven years on from their previous release, Madness return in fine form on their 13th studio album.

Its lead single and title song harks back to the ska sound that popularised the band some 40-odd years ago while perfectly capturing the essence of Madness in its examination of the perils of everyday life.

The 14-song set is without question the band's most pop-oriented in years - with a focus on big choruses across the running - and the songs linked by a series of six brief monologues, narrated by Martin Freeman.

Recent live favourites *Theatre Of The Absurd* and *Baby Burglar* serve as a warm-up for the main event, holding back before *What On Earth Is It (You Take Me For?)* taps into a formula that's served the group well over time; social commentary packaged with a feelgood mood.

The eerie *Lockdown And Frack Off* looks back on a particularly absurd time in recent history, while *Beginners 101* has a similar effect - if only as the closest thing the group comes to yacht rock.

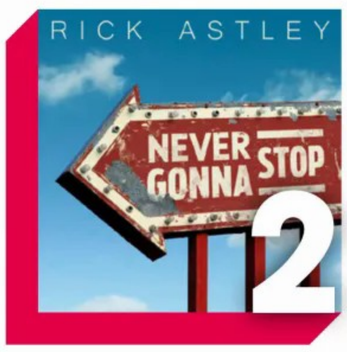
The last Act of *Run For Your Life* and *Set Me Free (Let Me Be)* is a victory lap of quintessential Madness, before closer *In My Street* gives final call to unity from Suggs. It's a profound message not only for fans for the group but the band themselves, whose working bond this time around results in one of their most captivating releases in decades.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

BEST OF 2023 TOP 10 SINGLES

KYLIE MINOGUE
PADAM PADAM **(BMG)**

It's the song that dominated the airwaves this summer, not only returning Kylie back to the Top 10 after more than a decade but also making waves globally thanks to what is one of the most irresistible pop hooks we've heard in a long time. Paving the way for her chart-topping 'Tension' album and hit Las Vegas residency, it more-than earns the title of **RETROPOP**'s Single Of The Year!



RICK ASTLEY
NEVER GONNA STOP **(BMG)**

It's the glorious '80s sounds of Stock Aitken Waterman that made us first fall in love with Rick, but decades on he's refined his prowess as a songwriter and musician and, on this cut from 'Are We There Yet?', he proves himself a master of all of the above. The mid tempo groove may not be expected, but his husky tone shines through on what's one of the most accomplished works of his career.

BELINDA CARLISLE
BIG BIG LOVE **(BMG)**

Over 25 years since her last pop record, new Belinda Carlisle was an exciting prospect from the off, but nothing could prepare us for the nostalgia trip of The Go-Go's star reuniting with Diane Warren and delivering an anthem that stands alongside her very best. With '80s synths and a soaring chorus - not to mention an enigmatic delivery from the singer who sounds as vibrant as ever - it's a stellar return to form.

JAKE SHEARS
TOO MUCH MUSIC **(Mute)**

His first solo outing was a far cry from the flamboyant frivolity we've come to expect from the Scissor Sisters frontman, but Jake's second solo LP, 'Last Man Dancing', reverts back to that classic sound and its lead single is a riotous call to the dance floor once more. Having seen us through the tail end of the winter and kept us dancing all summer long, it seems there never *can* be too much music where he's concerned.

DELTA GOODREM
BACK TO YOUR HEART **(ATLED)**

Having lived many lives in pop, Delta Goodrem's return to Europe this summer coincided with the release of her epic '80s-inspired anthem, somewhere between Starship and Tina Turner, offering a first taste of what's to come from her upcoming album. Twenty years on from her breakthrough, the Aussie star's vocals are as powerful and pure as ever and the direction strikes gold for the future.

BANANARAMA
FEEL THE LOVE **(London)**

The ultimate girl group have been more prolific in the past five years than they have in ages and after scoring some of the highest-charting albums of their career with 'In Stereo' (2019) and 'Masquerade' (2022), Sara and Keren are marking four decades of hits with 'Glorious', their forthcoming collection, also featuring their latest track. Reuniting them with Ian Masterson, it's a shimmering electro-pop extravaganza and proof they're still on top!

DANNII MINOGUE *WE COULD BE THE ONE* **(TwoFour)**

Rarely do TV songs turn out *this* good, but Dannii Minogue's return to the studio after five years away delivered not only a superb soundtrack for 'I Kissed A Boy', but one of her most euphoric dance-pop anthems ever! Rocketing to the top of the iTunes Chart and spawning a selection of club-friendly mixes, it only increased our appetite for the long-overdue follow-up to 'Club Disco' (2007).

THE KILLERS
YOUR SIDE OF TOWN **(Island)**

Rock may be The Killers' forte but their summer return with the standalone *Your Side Of Town* proved Brandon Flowers and co. can turn their hands to much more, including slick, radio-friendly synth-pop. Co-produced by Stuart Price and Shawn Everett, the track channels their love of classic acts like Pet Shop Boys, New Order and Depeche Mode for a direction that paves a clear path going forward.

AGNETHA FÄLTSKOG
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? **(BMG)**

Of all the members of ABBA, Agnetha was the least present during the promotion of 'Voyage' (2021), so her surprise return with 'A+' - the 2023 reworking of 2013 album 'A' - seemed to appear out of nowhere. So too did the inclusion of a newly-recorded song, which kicked off the campaign and proved that decades after fronting some of the biggest pop hits ever, she remains in fine voice.

SUGABABES
WHEN THE RAIN COMES **(BMG)**

Rarely do we see comebacks so successful as Sugababes', but in the past 12 months they surprise-released their 'lost' album on Christmas Eve, dominated the summer live circuit and headed into their massive gig at London's O2 by releasing the first 'Sugababes' single in over 10 years, from their forthcoming LP. The track revisits the sound of their classic debut and it's a joy to have Mutya, Keisha and Siobhan back!

BEST OF 2023 TOP 10 ARTIST COMPILATION/LIVE ALBUMS

BUSTED *GREATEST HITS 2.0* (Absolute)

With more than 20 years in pop under their belts, Busted threw the ultimate celebration by teaming up with a host of special guests for a massive re-worked 'Greatest Hits' album that put a new spin on all the classics with a little help from the likes of Jonas Brothers, McFly, Hanson and others. Also giving a taste of new music with the single *Good One*, the LP became the boys' first chart-topper and picks up this year's **RETROPOP** Artist Compilation Of The Year!

LOUISE *GREATEST HITS* (BMG)

Thirty years since Eternal released their classic debut album, 'Always & Forever', Louise's latest 'Greatest Hits' celebration not only saw her collect works from the group and her hugely successful solo career, but also re enter the studio and rework a handful of the tracks with a contemporary spin perfect for 2023. It's the new material that really sells the set and makes for an essential release of the past 12 months.

PET SHOP BOYS *SMASH - THE SINGLES 1985 - 2020* (Parlophone)

For their latest singles collection, Pet Shop Boys went all-out with an epic 55-song voyage through their decades-spanning catalogue, working chronologically through the duo's classic output, opening with their debut hit *West End Girls* and journeying through 2020's *Monkey Business*. With select editions including a Blu-Ray with a bumper 66 visuals presented in total, it's a fitting tribute to the career of two of synth-pop's finest.

WHAM! *THE SINGLES: ECHOES FROM THE EDGE OF HEAVEN* (Sony)

Coinciding with the 40th anniversary of their debut album, the duo's latest compilation brought together Wham!'s impeccable run of hit records along with a selection of additional tracks and mixes from across their career. Alongside the main album, a singles box set was a massive bonus that delivered the nostalgia of the Wham! repertoire all over again and proved knack for crafting and delivering hit after hit.

DEACON BLUE *ALL THE OLD 45s and YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL* (Cooking Vinyl)

On the back of their 35th anniversary celebrations, Deacon Blue revisited a lifetime of hits with their brand new best-of LP and comprehensive box set, offering either a whistle-stop tour through their singles or the complete album experience, with the addition of the newly-recorded 'Peace Will Come' acoustic set. Coinciding with a world tour from the band, it only cements their place in pop history.

LIAM GALLAGHER *KNEBWORTH 22* (Warner)

Twenty-six years since Oasis drew 250,000 people to Knebworth, Liam Gallagher made a bold return to the iconic venue for a show documented on his latest live record, which saw saw him and his band on fiery form throughout, blazing through a set of the group's classics and his solo material. Live records can be hit and miss but 'Knebworth 22' is a stellar display from one of the premier rock stars of a generation.

TINA TURNER *QUEEN OF ROCK 'N' ROLL* (Rhino)

Celebrating 50 years since the start of Tina Turner's solo career, 'Queen Of Rock 'N' Roll' collected 55 tracks as a thundering anthology of her enduring legacy, bringing together all-time classics such as *What's Love Got To Do With It*, *Private Dancer*, *Typical Male* and *The Best* and showcasing her ascent back to the top following her split with Ike. Arriving months after her passing, it proved her once again to be an all-time legend!

PWL *EXTENDED BIG HITS & SURPRISES. VOL. 1+2* (BMG)

OK, this one stretches the rules just a little, but it's rooted in the foundations of PWL and Stock Aitken Waterman's Hit Factory so we're going there. The first two instalments of the new series brought together classic hits and forgotten gems from the archives for the first time, collecting work from Kylie Minogue, Jason Donovan and Rick Astley, along with lesser-known acts like Lonnie Gordon, Paul Varney and Boy Krazy.

BRYAN ADAMS *LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL* (BMG)

Bryan Adams brought to life three of his classic albums for his latest live release direct from London's Royal Albert Hall, capturing 'Cuts Like A Knife' (1983), 'Into The Fire' (1987) and 'Waking Up The Neighbours' (1991) in their entirety. Packed with hits and giving a plethora of deep cuts airings for the first time in years, all while showcasing his ageless vocals and unwavering energy, it's a testament to his fine showmanship.

HOWARD JONES *CELEBRATE IT TOGETHER – THE VERY BEST OF* (Cherry Red)

Forty years of his recorded music career are collected on Howard Jones' latest new best-of, including songs from his classic Warner-era catalogue, as well as work from his independent Dtox label, highlighting the progression of his output over the decades and shining a spotlight on his work outside of the major label system. With 64 recordings, all remastered, and grouped into four categories by the performer himself, it's a strong set indeed.

BEST OF 2023 TOP 10 REISSUES

DANNII MINOGUE *NEON NIGHTS 20* (London)

The 20th anniversary edition of Dannii Minogue's fourth album delivered the ultimate celebration of the classic LP, with CD, vinyl, cassette and DVD components for the complete 'Neon Nights' experience. A bumper 7CD singles collection brought together remixes and rarities from the era - along with a bunch of newly-commissioned edits too - while a disc of remastered music videos and live performances offers the perfect snapshot of '00s nostalgia! Unquestionably **RETROPOP**'s Reissue Of The Year!

SOFT CELL *NON-STOP EROTIC CABARET* (Mercury)

Alongside the original LP, Soft Cell's bumper reissue of their classic debut served up an abundance of extra content, including the entire album in extended 12" form, plus remixes, demos, outtakes and audio from BBC TV and radio appearances from across the years. The addition of 'Non-Stop Intimate Cabaret' - featuring the album tracks performed live in 2021 - proves just how timeless the record truly is.

A-HA *HUNTING HIGH AND LOW* (BMG)

Clocking in at 60 tracks, the Norwegian group's iconic 1985 LP has never sounded better than in its remastered configuration, as part of a tracklisting that includes demos, extended versions, alternate mixes, and B-sides. Documenting the creative process from conception to release and promotion, the set also boasts a series of commercial remixes, which helped propel the album to become a true '80s classic.

ULTRAVOX *QUARTET* (Chrysalis)

It was the turn of Midge Ure's third Ultravox album to be reissued this year, with the massive set bursting with 70 tracks in total - including 47 previously unreleased recordings - such as new stereo mixes by Steven Wilson, A-sides, B-sides and live tracks, previously unreleased Cassette Rehearsals and Monitor Mixes along with a newly-mixed concert recorded at the Hammersmith Odeon in December 1982. Phew!

TOYAH *THE CHANGELING* (Cherry Red)

The seminal 1982 album from Toyah was expanded across two audio discs - including 20 previously unreleased tracks - and a further three previously unavailable on any CD, for its latest reissue, which contains outtakes, B-sides, an alternate album sequence of 'work in progress' variations, and home demo recordings. Meanwhile, the accompanying DVD features a wealth of classic content, plus up-to-date commentary from the lady herself!

MIDGE URE *THE GIFT* (Chrysalis)

The classic debut solo LP from the pop legend got another shot at the spotlight with a slick reissue housing an array of extra material, including his version of David Bowie's *The Man Who Sold The World* as well as the one off single with Japan's Mick Karn, *After A Fashion*. Along with B-sides, remixes and home recordings, it was accompanied by a brilliant, newly-mixed concert at Wembley Arena from 1985, showing Midge at the top of his game.

DANNII MINOGUE *GIRL* (90/9)

A second reissue from Dannii this year came in the form of another of our top releases of the past 12 months, this time seeing 'Girl' on vinyl for the first time and expanded with a CD box set containing the record along with a bumper run of remixes of the chart-topping dance tracks *All I Wanna Do*, *Everything I Wanted* and *Disremembrance*, plus promo release *Heaven Can Wait*. Another glorious collection!

CICERO *FUTURE BOY* (SFE)

An overlooked gem of an album from the Pet Shop Boys protégé, this year saw the LP widely available on wax for the first time since its release, with the addition of the 'lost' song, *Pretend*, and the 'Cicerovision' DVD, featuring music videos, live performance at London's Heaven nightclub and the original press kit. Meanwhile, a 3CD edition boasts the record plus bonus material including the non-album song, *Live For Today*, and five excellent brand new remixes.

JIMMY SOMERVILLE *READ MY LIPS* (London)

The debut solo album from Bronski Beat and The Communards frontman arrived ahead of its 35th anniversary on single and double vinyl, plus a double CD set, with remixes from William Orbit, AMYL, B-Sides, and rarities such as *From This Moment On* (from 'Red, Hot and Blue') and *I Believe in Love* (with Arthur Baker and The Beat Disciples). With alternate artworks and merchandise nodding back to the era, the attention to detail is particularly impressive.

SIOBHAN DONAGHY *REVOLUTION IN ME* (London)

The debut solo album from the Sugababes star may not have been top of our list for anticipated reissues, but revisiting the record that largely went under the radar 20 years ago offered a newfound appreciation for the work, with a 16-song package of additional outtakes, B-sides and alternate mixes an extra treat. Together, it makes for an excellent reissue and proof that an album doesn't have to shift millions of copies to warrant revisiting like this.

BEST OF 2023 TOP 10 RETRO REVIVAL ALBUMS

JESSIE WARE *THAT! FEELS GOOD!* (EMI)

Following up 'What's Your Pleasure?' was never going to be easy but Jessie Ware faced the challenge head on and delivered some of her finest work to date on 'That! Feels Good!', building upon the club sensibilities of her fourth album with a newfound theatricality and confidence that befits an artist a decade into her career. Still on constant rotation following its spring release, it's unquestionably **RETROPOP**'s Revival Album Of The Year!

TROYE SIVAN *SOMETHING TO GIVE EACH OTHER* (Capitol)

This year was without doubt the Aussie summer of pop, and while Kylie Minogue's *Padam Padam* seemed set to dominate the airwaves indefinitely, Troye Sivan's *Rush* - the lead single from 'Something To Give Each Other' - crept in and proved his pop star credentials. It's accompanying LP is steeped in dance floor euphoria and showcases his evolution in recent years, quickly becoming a favourite of 2023.

V V BROWN *AM I BRITISH YET?* (YOY)

Less a pop album and more a concept piece, the fifth album from V V Brown saw the singer-songwriter branch out farther than ever before and in doing so excel in showcasing her musical prowess, defying genre boundaries and creating what is by all accounts a groundbreaking body of work. Collecting verse, poetry and lecture samples, with her vocal a constant thread, it's a defining moment in her career.

GEORGIA *EUPHORIC* (Domino)

The follow-up to Georgia's breakthrough, 'Seeking Thrills', saw the musician take her sound out into the world, stepping out of the bedroom where she penned the majority of her early material and collaborating with musicians including Rostam Batmanglij and William Orbit on a vibrant collection of hits that leans into classic pop formulas, with a focus on the musician's personal lyrics and emotive delivery.

JUNGLE *VOLCANO* (AWAL)

Embracing a more global sound this time around, the fourth LP from the London-based act, starring Josh Lloyd-Watson and Tom McFarland, showcases the pair's innovative and forward-thinking production, from intricate and complex beats to soaring synths and soulful melodies, for a body of work that's current yet innately timeless. Navigating a spectrum of sounds with skill, its their most accomplished release yet!

KESHA *GAG ORDER* (RCA)

Pop's party girl defied expectations with 'Gag Order'; a no-holds-barred insight into the life and mind of an embattled artist who finds herself pushed to the brink yet determined to overcome anything that's hurled her way. Produced by Rick Rubin, it's a dark and brooding work, with a building tension via pulsing synths and heavy reverb that mirrors the subject of her lyrics and lays her story bare like never before.

THE LOTTERY WINNERS *ANXIETY REPLACEMENT THERAPY* (Modern Sky)

Tackling mental health in pop music is nothing new, but the latest album from The Lottery Winners sees the group embody the essence of anxiety across 10 loud and bombastic tracks - a guise for the thinly-veiled lyrical content that speaks openly on various stages of mental illness, from depression and stress to reclusiveness and obsessiveness. With appearances from Boy George, Frank Turner and Shaun Ryder, it's a standout.

THE JORDAN *NOWHERE NEAR THE SKY* (Cooking Vinyl)

Best known as vocalist with jazz-pop collective Caro Emerald, The Jordan - aka Caroline van der Leeuw - lays herself bare on her first, self-penned solo project, jumping between sounds and styles, with elements of trip-hop and folktronica, on a record that sees her let go of the past and look to the future, embracing a new way of living and ultimately emerging liberated. Sometimes risks pay off - and this one was certainly a success.

SG LEWIS *AUDIOLUST & HIGHERLOVE* (EMI)

A project of two halves - part all-out disco stormers, along with a selection of more laid-back, ambient offerings - the second album from SG Lewis showcases the versatility of the singer, songwriter and producer with his most varied work to date. It makes for a collection that, much like its creator, refuses to be pigeon holed, acting instead as a musical sandbox without boundaries and proving him not only to be a fine producer, but a superb pop star.

RAYE *MY 21ST CENTURY BLUES* (Human Re Sources)

Forging her own path forward, this year saw RAYE rise from the ashes and triumph with her long-awaited debut album, showcasing her lush vocals over R&B grooves, trip, soul and blues, fusing classic sounds with a contemporary edge that's instantly timeless. Arriving on the back of hit single *Escapism*, the LP reads as a liberating sigh of relief for the singer who, a decade after emerging on the scene, is finally able to fulfil her vision.

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Rod Stewart · Howard Jones · Simple Minds · The Cure · and many more . . .

1983

That's Wha

All you need is NOW

As **NOW Music** turns 40, Managing Director Jamii Layton revisits its storied history and looks ahead to the next four decades of one of pop's best-loved brands!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

It's four decades ago that the idea for NOW Music was first conceived in the office of Virgin Records in London.

Taking its name from a 1920s advertising poster for Danish Bacon, featuring a pig saying "Now. That's What I Call Music" as it listened to a chicken singing, it formed the foundations for a brand that would keep pop fans entertained for decades.

The pig became the mascot for the series, too, but beneath the surface what really propelled the brand forward is a profound understanding of what audiences really want - which, according to Managing Director Jamii Layton, remains integral to its success today.

There's such a massive history when it comes to the NOW brand. How do you approach that as MD?

JL: I have a huge admiration for the brand and the amazing job that has been done by everyone who has worked as part of it over the years. When we create something new we task ourselves to maintain the high standards of the past, whether in terms of curation, or concept and design. NOW has a really engaged fanbase that has been enjoying (and collecting) the releases for up to 40 years – and it's important to us that they are continuing to enjoy the new releases and want to discuss them with other fans.

What was your familiarity with NOW? Were you a fan/collector beforehand?

JL: I am a huge fan of pop music in general, which includes most genres – and since I was a kid I've followed the charts every week. Whether with a contemporary numbered edition, or a genre or era specific edition, NOW has always offered the opportunity to listen to, and collect, a large number of singles that I could have never had access to otherwise. Plus, there have always been

tracks that I wasn't so familiar with, particularly in pre-Internet times, so NOW often served as my introduction to songs and artists that I may have otherwise missed (and still does). These things were irresistible to such a pop singles and charts lover...

Do you have a particular NOW memory?

JL: Like many people, I received the first NOW for Christmas in 1983. I played it so many times and was fascinated with the idea that I had access to so many singles in one place! When the second volume was released in early 1984, I was in the record shop on the day of release with some friends. A couple of us bought the album and spent hours discussing the tracks and already guessing from the latest charts what might be on the next one (if volume three were to be!)... We were so pleased that a second volume had been released! And some years later, I worked in a busy record shop and always enjoyed seeing so many people looking forward to and buying the NOW albums.

NOW started on vinyl and has appeared across formats in its lifetime. Why do you think it's held its appeal?

JL: NOW has always offered amazing choice. The numbered volumes are a capsule of that time in pop and the charts, and as such are inclusive of so many types of pop music, so I think that broadness is very appealing. They also often ignite conversations about the artists and songs that appear, which gives them a fantastic social aspect. After 40 years they still foster an incredible range of commentary – these days on social media and on music forums...

Similarly, in a digital landscape where music is readily available and some would say compilations are somewhat irrelevant, why do you think NOW continues to be successful?

JL: I think that trusted curation is key. With the numbered editions, NOW offers an easy way to access a cross-section of current trends and popularity, and with a retro or genre specific selection the listener can know that the selection of tracks, and sequencing, has been carefully considered. Since we started on the 'Yearbook' range a couple of years ago, so many people have told me that they have discovered an artist that they weren't previously familiar with, and went on to discover more of their music...

I think that the present time is the most exciting ever to be a music fan. Digital music offers instant accessibility and so much choice, but I also think physical formats can offer a unique tangible bridge to the music contained on them. Looking at my own music consumption, I enjoy streaming, I

> **WITH A RETRO OR GENRE SPECIFIC SELECTION THE LISTENER CAN KNOW THAT THE SELECTION OF TRACKS, AND SEQUENCING, HAS BEEN CAREFULLY CONSIDERED**

buy albums on vinyl and CD, and I download tracks... And similarly, NOW exists across all these different ways of enjoying the music. So I think all can and should co-exist to make music as wide and immersive an experience as possible, with none of them being irrelevant.

Is there an ethos or mission statement when compiling each edition, to reflect not only the charts but also what's happening in the wider pop world?

JL: With the numbered series, we always try to ensure that the selection reflects the past few months – not only on the Singles Chart, but in a wider sense, to encapsulate what our audience may have heard and enjoyed recently. So airplay, film and TV popularity, album releases and significant events surrounding music are all taken into consideration.

The themed/Yearbook editions have injected new life into the series. Tell us about those and their role in sustaining the brand.

JL: The 'Yearbook' series has been a true joy to create as a singles-obsessed pop fan. This series is a great example of where careful curation is as important today and it ever was. Between the main 'Yearbook' release and its 'Yearbook Extra' we are offering approximately 140 tracks – and the selections are debated at length on the social groups and forums... and these are a great example of how people continue to enjoy collecting physical products...

We offer a regular CD version, but also produce a 'hardback-book' style CD format that includes a booklet featuring some stats and info about each track, and a selection on coloured vinyl. The response from people collecting the series has been fantastic and has shown us how valuable this type of curation is.

NOW also seeps out into other formats and territories. How do you navigate those spaces and why, again, do you think it resonates with fans?

JL: NOW is a brand that has been part of the musical journey of millions of people over the past 40 years, so we are extremely respectful of its heritage when deciding how the brand may be used. We are always looking at potential opportunities – and we are very excited that a brand new musical, 'NOW That's What I Call A Musical', has just been announced, which is a great way to salute the legacy by celebrating the magic of pop music, and allowing the brand to continue to be a part of peoples' musical entertainment.

> **"THE 'YEARBOOK' SERIES HAS BEEN A TRUE JOY TO CREATE AS A SINGLES-OBSESSED POP FAN"**

Forty years is a huge achievement - do you see another 40 for NOW?

JL: NOW's journey has always been about presenting the best choice of popular music available, and whether that's with a contemporary numbered edition, or with an era or genre specific title, I think there will always be a place for NOW as a trusted curator, that offers a way to discover more music, whether present or from the past. I can't predict what another 40 years could look like, but I'm sure that the next few will be an exciting time for Now That's What I Call Music.... **RP**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NOW

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Step by step

Wet Wet Wet (l-r): Graeme Duffin, Kevin Simm, Graeme Clark

Their '80s and '90s hits are the stuff of pop legend but **Wet Wet Wet** are ready to embark on a new chapter as they return to the road!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

The late-'80s and 1990s saw a group of Scottish soft rockers own the UK charts: Wet Wet Wet.

Between '87 and '97, the band released five hit albums and scored a trio of No. 1s - *With A Little Help From My Friends*, *Goodnight Girl* and *Love Is All Around* - along with international success, making them one of the most acclaimed acts of the era.

In the years since, they've continued to release music and play live and now, after a series of line-up changes, frontman Kevin Simm, bassist Graeme Clark and guitarist Graeme Duffin tell all about their plans for the future, including their upcoming tour with fellow pop greats, Go West!

THIS TIME

"It's the first time we've done headline shows since before the pandemic, so it is a big deal," admits Simm of the forthcoming run of concerts, which kicks off January 21 in Cardiff with 15 dates through February 7, when the co-headline trek wraps in Glasgow.

"We've been all around the world doing amazing festivals, but we really wanted to tour the UK and reconnect with the fans, and it's nice that Go West are doing it with us, because they're an amazing band with amazing songs as well."

Not only will the group be able to connect with fans in a more intimate setting than the vast outdoor shows that have characterised their summer, but the concerts will also allow them to dig into the Wet Wet Wet catalogue and bring out classics other than the Top 10 staples that the festival gigs demand.

"We can really do a deep dive and explore what songs we want to bring out," adds Clark. "We did an album two or three years ago ['The Journey' (2021)] and I keep seeing people on social media saying 'Are you going to play *this* song?' or 'What about *that* song?', but I think we're gonna have to be realistic about it in a sense, because the majority of the set has to be songs that people know and we won't digress too far away from that. But we can bleed in some new songs and also re-address some of the older ones that never made it into the set. So I'm looking forward to scratching that surface again..."

Not only will the shows allow the group to switch up the content of their setlist, but they'll also allow them to introduce new band members Matt Carter (keyboards) Simon Lea (drums), who replaced outgoing members Neil Mitchell and Tommy Cunningham, respectively.

"This is kind of like a rebirth for us, because we've got the new boys in the band and they've freshened it up a bit," he adds, "which is the brilliant thing about this band; we've been out there for 35 years and this is an exciting new chapter for us to move forward and see where we go."

> ***There will come a point in time when we can no longer do it, but if you look at The Rolling Stones, man - we've got another 25 years in there!***
>
> **GRAEME CLARK**

Five years since he joined the line-up in place of original frontman Marti Pellow, how does Kevin feel about no longer being the new boy? "It feels strange, but it's also kind of cool," he smiles. "People are shocked when I say I've been part of the group for five years, because in reality I was a member of Liberty X back in the day for seven years, so this is almost as long - which blows my mind a little bit!"

Duffin - who arrived in 1983 - chimes in: "I was the new boy for 35 years before Kevin joined! It's 40 years now - I must be the longest-serving guitar player in pop history!"

ALL AROUND

Hailing from Glasgow, Scotland, the band formed in 1982 and took their name from Scritti Politti's *Gettin' Havin' & Holdin'*: *'It's tired of joking... wet, wet with tears'*. Their first single, *Wishing I Was Lucky*, was released in early 1987 and launched the group into the UK Top 10, with its parent album, 'Popped In Souled Out', released in September, soaring to the top of the charts.

In '88, they took home the BRIT Award for British breakthrough Act and over the next decade returned to the top of the Albums Chart with 'High on The Happy Side' (1992), 'End of Part One: Their Greatest Hits' (1993) and 'Picture This' (1995), with 'Holding Back The River' (1989) and '10' (1997) both peaking at No. 2.

Revisiting their catalogue in hindsight, Duffin says they're pleasantly surprised by how well the majority of their work has held up throughout

the years. "Every time we decide to resurrect an older song it's like, 'Do you know what? This sounds good!' And we always enjoy that," he smiles. "Quite what songs will appear on this tour, I've no idea yet, but it always gives us a fresh appreciation for the songs, and it'll be great to play a couple of the songs on the previous album too."

How does Kevin, who was barely two years old when the band formed and only just a teenager when *Love Is All Around* blew up, relate to the music? "Although I've known the songs for 20-odd years, I've only been performing them for five so they're still quite fresh for me," he reflects. "When we're doing festivals and stuff like that, you want the best reaction possible from the crowd and to have the most fun on stage, which comes from playing the hits that people know. The relationship you have with the audience when you perform these songs is quite special and, if I'm honest, I'm not one of those people that's like, 'Oh, I don't really want to do *this* one this time', because I'm quite content with anything that we do.

"That being said, it will be nice to, on this tour, maybe do a couple of tracks from the last album because no one's really heard us perform them live. But, you know, it's quite a privileged position to have such a massive pool of songs you can pull from to create your set."

They may have a vast archive of hits but when it comes to the future the Wet Wet Wet boys are keen not to rest on their laurels. "That's the most important thing for me. You have to strike this balance of not being an entirely 'heritage act', because we've got new guys in and we can take it somewhere," reflects Clark, who auditioned several musicians for the line-up before settling on Matt and Simon.

"Simon was an obvious choice for drummer, but it was less so with our keyboard player, who came in without the experience of some of the other people around. But I really liked the idea that he was a young guy, a very accomplished musician, and he's a jazzer.

"I'm not a jazzer by any stretch of the imagination, but I like being pulled in that direction and that infusion, where we can cross-pollinate things in music. And that goes right back to when Graeme Duffin joined, because he is a jazzer and he's very steeped in jazz music."

GOODNIGHT

Between 1997 and 2007, Wet Wet Wet underwent an extended hiatus, returning that year with their sixth album, 'Timeless' - the last to feature Pellow on vocals. It was another 14 before they finally released a follow-up, and Clark shares his regret that the group wasn't more prolific.

> ***Every time we decide to resurrect an older song it's like, 'Do you know what? This sounds good!'***
>
> **GRAEME DUFFIN**

"I look at Duran Duran and I respect them because they've continually made new music over the last 25 years and it's a testament to where they sit now," he insists. "They're out, they're back on the road and playing arenas all over the world, and I think it's because they've remained current.

"If I could point to any problematic nature of where we were in the last 35 years it's that we didn't service that new music thing because there wasn't the energy from the people that were there at the time. Now, I think there is an energy with the younger guys in the band, and for me it's all about creating music."

Case in point; when we speak, both Graemes are in Scotland and Kevin is in the Caribbean, where he's taken his recording equipment and just been sent a song, written with the band's newest members, to demo - as the bassist is quick to point out. Simm clarifies: "I got a message from Graeme very late - which I meant to get back to him on - about this demo, and I have a lot of respect for Graeme's passion for writing, so sometimes when I'm away I bring my recording equipment and try to do stuff, but a lot of the time it stays in my case and doesn't come out because I'm too busy at the bar! But I promise you, Graeme, there's going to be a demo coming your way."

For a group that's "notoriously slow" with recording material, Clark points out the benefits of modern technology in keeping the group connected. He nods to The Beatles' use of AI in restoring their chart-topping single, *Now And*

Then, but insists that while there's "tonnes of stuff" in the vault that's yet to be released, he has no desire to revisit the past while he's alive and kicking and would rather look to the future.

"Hopefully, come the end of the next 12 months, we may have something ready to unleash, as well as doing some gigs," he adds. "The gigs are the lifeblood of the band and we've got an amazing start to the year, then some festivals are coming up, and I hope we'll also look at this album and get that ready too.

He adds: "There will come a point in time when we can no longer do it, but if you look at The Rolling Stones - man, we've got another 25 years in there! So let's keep creating..." **RP**

> ***It will be nice to, on this tour, maybe do a couple of tracks from the last album because no one's really heard us performing them live.***
>
> **KEVIN SIMM**

● ***Wet Wet Wet and Go West's 'Best Of Both Worlds' tour launches January 21 in Cardiff. The group's 'Live In Denmark' album arrives January 19.***

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

MORE, MORE, MORE...

A born disruptor, electronic visionary **Jean-Michel Jarre** discusses new technology and its potential for the music industry as he introduces his latest album!

WORDS SIMON BUTTON

He's been hailed as 'The Godfather of Electronica' and proven himself a musical pioneer since the mid-'70s, so it comes as no surprise that Jean-Michel Jarre is excited about the rise of Artificial Intelligence.

The man who found fame with his groundbreaking 'Oxygène' album in 1976 and has continued to push the envelope since is modest about the Godfather reference, insisting: "I like the Romanesque and Italian image to it, but it was all about timing and I've been really lucky to live through three moments of disruption. When I started electronic music, I had almost no references because before me, you didn't have many people working and dealing with synthesisers in a totally different style of composition."

The second moment of disruption? "That, of course, was the emergence of computers and the digital era." And the third? "That's maybe the most important one and that's the emergence of AI. I think, for young artists, it's a fantastic opportunity to actually shape the future with new instruments and new technology. It's strange how, especially in Europe, we are scared of innovation. Always thinking that yesterday was better and tomorrow is going to be worse..."

EXTENSION

Speaking down the phone from his Paris home, 75-year-old Jarre adds: "It's obviously not true, otherwise you and I wouldn't be talking together today. And I think that the appetite for innovation is very vivid these days for young artists. This moment of disruption is going to create the power of tomorrow."

The French composer, producer and performer is a forward-thinker who took the avant-garde stylings of the likes of Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk into the mainstream and has gone on to sell more than 85 million records, whilst putting on spectacular live shows that have influenced so many artists.

He's a sonic frontiersman who declares: "Some artists love to repeat themselves because it makes them feel secure. But I'm quite convinced that any kind of artist, in any kind of art form, should use their curiosity to explore new territories and to express themselves within their own style."

AI, he feels, is a tool that music-makers shouldn't feel threatened by because it will never replace them. "Technology is neutral," he explains. "It all depends on what we do with it and for me, AI is an extension of my imagination. AI is the idea of harvesting big data, right? And when we have a new idea, what's happening is that we're harvesting our own data - our recollections, our culture, our souvenirs - in a random way, picking from our past some random elements and giving birth to this new musical idea.

"With AI it's the same process. AI, we should never forget, is about harvesting the past. I don't see any kind of danger in it. Well, all new technology is potentially dangerous." He pauses, searches for an explanatory analogy and comes up with a nifty one: "The first invention was fire and fire can be pretty dangerous, but also it helped create fire brigades."

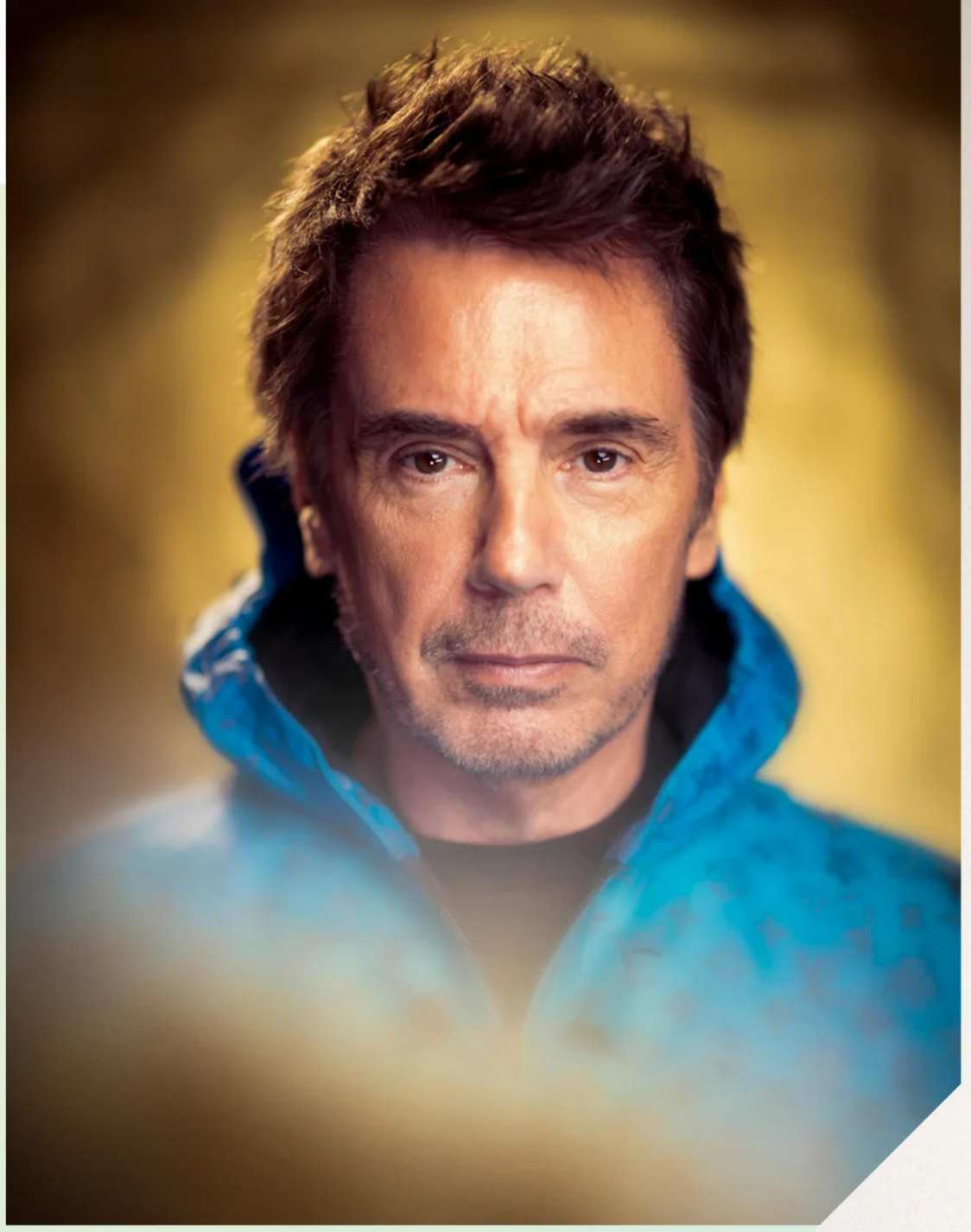
Jarre's new album, his 23rd so far, was done with real people, not artificial beings. 'Oxymoreworks' is a reworking of 2022's 'Oxymore', with Brian Eno and Armin Van Buuren the better-known names of guests on a roster that also includes Deathpact, Nina Kraviz and French 79. The original album was a tribute to Pierre Henry, the late French composer who worked in the 'musique concrète' field in the '40s and '50s, using recorded sounds as the raw material for his compositions.

Jarre sees Henry and his contemporaries, like Pierre Schaeffer's work, as influential and groundbreaking. "They had a major influence on the future, the way we are doing music these days, with this kind of cooking approach, mixing spices and ingredients to create unexpected results."

When it came to 'Oxymoreworks', the man who tends to work solo but also has his sideline 'Electronica' project, where he brings in other musicians, was fascinated by the idea of ▶

> **AI, WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET, IS ABOUT HARVESTING THE PAST. I DON'T SEE ANY KIND OF DANGER IN IT**

revisiting an album through a collaborative lens. "So I asked some artists to create a kind of extension of the original album, to rework some of the tracks of their choosing. In a sense, I was also inviting them to pay tribute in their own way to the roots of electronic music that Henry and Schaeffer explored."



MACHINE

Jarre has been an explorer since he studied classical piano, checked out jazz clubs with his mother (his father, the legendary film composer Maurice Jarre, moved to the US when Jean-Michel was five), played guitar in a local band and began experimenting with tape loops and electronic sounds. In 1976, using analogue and digital synthesisers, and electronic instruments, he recorded 'Oxygène' in a homemade studio in his kitchen. Major labels were baffled by its long, vocal-free tracks but, released by a French independent, it went on to sell 18 million copies around the world.

Coming out two years later, 'Equinoxe' was another big-seller that solidified his status as a major player in electronica. There was no pressure the first time round. "All artists know that the first album, your first success, is quite peaceful because nobody is expecting anything from you. 'Oxygène' came out during the era of punk and disco so it was a total UFO, a strange beast."

There were more expectations around 'Equinoxe'. "But you have to realise as early as possible that, actually, successes - like failures - are accidents. As an artist, your way is in the middle and the earlier you realise that, the better life you will have."

Most of his subsequent albums have enjoyed healthy sales and you won't hear him moaning about Sony Music, whom he's been with for many years now. "I have an excellent relationship with my record company and they let me do more or less what I want to do. I know these days that lots of people find it rather cool to complain about the industry and yes, there are fights around respecting intellectual property and authors' rights. But you should not forget that in record companies, you have lots of good guys and good girls who are really in love with music."

> **I'M NOT PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN REPEATING MYSELF BUT I THINK A PREQUEL TO 'OXYGÈNE' COULD BE FUN**

The technicalities of making records have changed, he notes, but the principles remain the same. "It's all about what you want to evoke in terms of feelings. There is no progress in human feelings. Looking at 5,000 years ago or 200 years ago or today or in the future, artists are expressing the same kind of feelings, like solitude, love, hate, our relationship with death or culture, whatever. These kinds of fundamental feelings are timeless. What's changing are the instruments you are using. Using a computer is not the same as using an analogue synthesiser, for instance, but the dialogue with the interface remains more or less the same."

REPRISE

Jarre's live shows are legendary. He's performed in Place de la Concorde

“I’M QUITE CONVINCED THAT ANY KIND OF ARTIST, IN ANY KIND OF ART FORM, SHOULD USE THEIR CURIOSITY TO EXPLORE NEW TERRITORIES AND TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITHIN THEIR OWN STYLE”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

and La Defense in Paris, at NASA’s 25th anniversary in Houston, and around the globe in Egypt, China, London’s Docklands and the Sahara Desert, dazzling concertgoers with visual marvels whilst often breaking attendance records. Even a modest-sounding man like Jean-Michel has to admit he’s had a huge influence on other acts, saying: “Today you cannot conceive a tour in the pop, rock or electronic music fields, or even in hip-hop, without massive visual elements.”

His interest in and embracing of AI feels apposite for a musician whose official website describes him as “optimistic in nature”. And he has an interesting take on what that means in the present day. “I think today we have to be optimistic by subversion, almost. I’m quite fed up with people always whining, after centuries, about the idea that yesterday was better and tomorrow is going to be worse.

“As I said earlier, so far it has not been the case but this kind of apocalyptic vision of the future is probably in the human DNA because we know that we’re not going to be part of that future. It’s not a matter of optimism, it’s just a matter of being realistic. With AI, for instance, we urgently should create regulations. All these people say, ‘But regulation is harming freedom’. That’s bullshit. The difference between democracy and chaos is actually the fact of creating rules.”

Likening AI to an industrial revolution, Jarre adds: “We have to create rules for intellectual property and for protecting some of the social aspects of what could be really harmful to some people in our society. So yes, we have to create the rules, but at the same time we’re creating new tools.” He laughs. “I don’t necessarily see us heading for an apocalyptic, Arnold Schwarzenegger in ‘The Terminator’ type of future.”

As for his more immediate future, Jean-Michel isn’t ruling out a return to the ‘Oxygene’ franchise he’s so far mined across several albums. “As Federico Fellini, the Italian director, told me one day, all his life he thought that he was doing pretty different movies, but looking back he realised that he did more or less the same movie over and over again. I’m not particularly interested in repeating myself but I think a prequel to ‘Oxygène’ could be fun.”

With the help of AI, of course... **RP**

● ***‘Oxymoreworks’ is out now on Sony.***

THE ULTIMATE 2024 PREVIEW

PHOTO NIK PATE

RÓISÍN MURPHY'S HIT PARADE

Róisín Murphy will tour her latest album, 'Hit Parade', early next year.

The electronic star will launch the run in Leeds on February 8, playing across the UK through February 17 with a stop at London's Alexandra Palace.

She'll then take the show to Europe, starting March 8 in Amsterdam and continuing with 10 stops through March 21 in Paris.

The shows will feature a "full band, exceptional visuals, new songs and old, a little something for everyone".

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

NILE RODGERS' SUMMER DISCO

Nile Rodgers & Chic will embark on a UK tour throughout the summer with special guest Sophie Ellis-Bextor.

The disco legends will perform five shows across the country, starting at The Piece Hall in Halifax on June 16 and stopping in Southampton, Bedford and Llangollen.

Wrapping at Dreamland Margate on July 13, the group will be joined by pop star Sophie for the dates. Deco will also perform.

"Thrilled to announce we're bringing the 'Good Times' back across England and Wales in 2024!" Rodgers shared in a social media announcement.

"Mark your calendars because we're gonna light up the night, celebrate life, and dance like there's no tomorrow."

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

ARENA RUN FOR RICK ASTLEY

Rick Astley resumes his 'Are We There Yet?' arena run in February after kicking off the shows in style with two nights at London's Royal Albert Hall.

The *Never Gonna Give You Up* hitmaker will travel across the country throughout February and March in support of his latest hit album, featuring the singles *Dippin My Feet*, *Never Gonna Stop* and *Forever And More*.

With a handful of shows already sold out, Rick has extended the initial run with a pair of dates in Ireland in March, followed by a series of shows in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Belinda Carlisle will join the *Together Forever* star on the UK dates and Scouting For Girls will support in Ireland. Support for the mainland Europe shows has yet to be announced.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO PETER NEILL

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The Girls Aloud show

Girls Aloud are reuniting for a massive reunion tour across the UK and Ireland throughout May and June.

Nadine Coyle, Cheryl Tweedy, Nicola Roberts and Kimberley Walsh will perform a string of arena dates in celebration of their 21st anniversary and in honour of their late bandmate, Sarah Harding.

"We all started talking about the possibility of doing something to celebrate Girls Aloud's 20-year anniversary a few years ago. The anniversary seemed like an obvious thing that we would celebrate," says Cheryl. "But when Sarah fell ill all priorities changed. She passed away a year before the anniversary and it just didn't feel right, it felt too soon. But now, I think there is an energy that makes it feel right.

"It's the right time to celebrate Sarah, it's the right time to celebrate the band and the right time to celebrate the fact we can still do this 21 years later. That's a big honour in lots of ways."

Nadine adds: "Girls Aloud are a band that made such a huge impact on people's lives. We grew up with the band, but so did so many other people. So for us not to do something again feels like such a shame and a waste. We want to have that moment with fans where we can all enjoy it together."

Sarah passed away in September 2021 following a battle with advanced breast cancer and, alongside all of their classic hits, including *Sound Of The Underground*, *Call The Shots*, *Love Machine* and *The Promise*, the group will pay tribute to the singer during the concerts.

"Over the last year, we've felt this outpouring of love – obviously towards Sarah, but actually towards all of us as a group," reflects Kimberley. "And I guess it ignited something in all of us again. It feels like something has changed and it does feel like the right time to celebrate Sarah and the 20-year anniversary that we didn't celebrate at the time."

Nicola continues: "I think what's really encouraging is that whenever people ask us about reuniting it's not, 'Would you guys ever do it?' but 'When are you guys gonna do it?' To know we still have that love from our fans and people who watched us grow up gives us the confidence to do the tour.

"It will be a massive celebration of everything we've done up to this point. We want people to leave being like, 'Wow, I've just had one of the best nights of my life'."

Despite reports, Girls Aloud will not be releasing any new music around the tour and the band haven't recorded any new songs or filmed any music videos, despite recent reports. Instead, the tour will be a celebration of Girls Aloud's catalogue and the success they have achieved as a band. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

THE ULTIMATE

2024 PREVIEW

PHOTO STEPHANIE PISTEL

DURAN DURAN FESTIVAL EXCLUSIVE

Duran Duran have been unveiled as the headliners for the 2024 edition of Latitude Festival.

The band is set to take the main stage as the festival returns to the grounds of Henham Park, Suffolk, from July 25 to 28.

It marks their only UK festival performance of the year.

Bassist John Taylor says: "We are excited to be making Latitude our sole UK performance next summer. It's a great festival, and it's been a long time since Duran have been in that part of the country.

"In fact, it's our first time ever in Suffolk. We are riding high on the reception our new 'Danse Macabre' album has received, and looking forward to bringing music from that record, all the way back to our 1981 debut album. See you there!"

Melvin Benn, Latitude's Festival Director, adds: "Duran Duran's fusion of artistry and innovation seamlessly resonates with Latitude's commitment to curate a multifaceted cultural experience. Celebrated for their iconic style, ground-breaking music, and a consistent string of chart-topping hits, the band have unquestionably left their mark on both the music and fashion realms.

"With their ongoing evolution and the ability to transcend musical boundaries, the band's mesmerising live performances make them an ideal fit for the Latitude festival."

Tickets are on sale now.

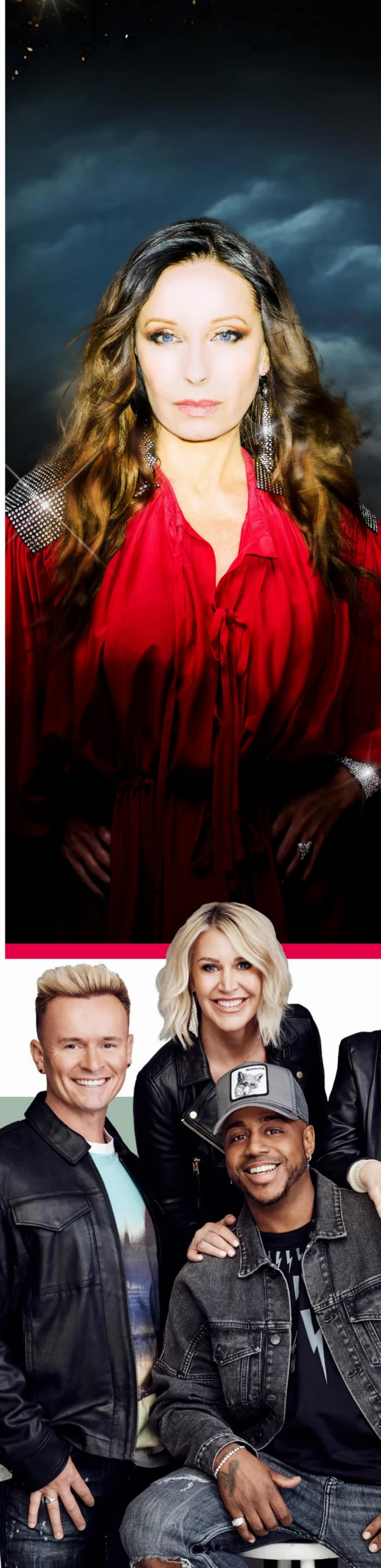


PHOTO LEIGH KEILY

S Club party continues

S Club look to have more new music on the way after releasing their first single in 20 years.

After wrapping the UK leg of their 'Good Times Tour', the group spoke with US TV show Today ahead of their US shows and offered a glimpse into the band's future.

Following the success of *These Are The Days*, Jon Lee confirmed plans to head back into the studio soon.

"There will definitely be new music next year. We don't know what it is yet, but that's something we've all talked about," he teased.

Meanwhile, Tina Barrett suggested the group could also return to their onscreen origins in the near future, adding: "And we've always done TV stuff. So yeah, maybe a documentary, who knows..."

Meanwhile, the group's Stateside run launches in February.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

BANANARAMA GET GLORIOUS AT 40

PHOTO MARK MATTOCK

Bananarama are celebrating over 40 years at the top with the release of 'Glorious – The Ultimate Collection'!

Curated by Sara Dallin and Keren Woodward to collect four decades of material, the career-spanning retrospective also includes their latest single, *Feel The Love*.

"We wanted this to be a unique collection, a celebration of all the twists and turns in our career," says Sara. "We compiled endless lists of songs, album tracks and hit singles and whittled it down to forty: our favourite tracks from the past four decades. Leafing through my early lyric books transported me back to that teenage girl writing poems and scribbles that would eventually be turned into songs.

"Each track... is a piece of the jigsaw and a connection to me. Together they create the bigger picture, the story of us as artists. It has been one almighty journey."

Spanning their debut album, 'Deep Sea Skiving' (1982), through to 2022 release, 'Masquerade', the 40-song album includes hits such as *Cruel Summer*, *Venus*, *Love In The First Degree*, *Move In My Direction* and *Look On The Floor (Hypnotic Tango)*, while a deluxe edition features an additional 10-track remix disc.

Keren adds: "At times we have maybe felt that we haven't received the credit, respect, and recognition we deserve, certainly sometimes purely down to the fact we were born female. I feel the collection of songs we have amassed over the last four decades hopefully speak for themselves, so I don't have to.

"Putting the music together for this project... made me realise how much we have achieved and how determined, tenacious, and hardworking we are."

Following the release, Bananarama will play a pair of special London Palladium shows on April 3 and 4. Tickets are on sale now.

PHOTO MICHAEL CLEMENT

JAMES BLUNT ON THE ROAD

James Blunt will embark on a tour of the UK and Europe next spring in support of his latest album, 'Who We Used To Be'.

The singer-songwriter and his band will play a massive run of dates across the continent, kicking off February 20 in Rennes, France and hitting Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Germany.

Launching the UK and Ireland leg, he'll take to the stage at Leeds' First Direct Arena on March 30 and play 12 shows, finishing April 14 at the Bournemouth International Centre.

"I cannot find the words to say how excited I am to get back out on the road again on tour in 2024," James says. "My new album was incredibly fun to write and record, and some of the new songs will undoubtedly get you up on your feet and dancing again.

"I'm looking forward to crowd surfing at a venue near you!"

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

THE ULTIMATE

2024 PREVIEW

ALI CAMPBELL TOURS UB40

UB40 featuring Ali Campbell will take 'The Hits Tour' to arenas across the UK in the spring.

Celebrating the biggest songs from the UK's most successful reggae band of all time, the run will launch on April 6 in Liverpool and play through April 16 in Nottingham.

News of the live dates was announced alongside the band's induction into the Music Walk of Fame, with a stone having been unveiled on the Walk of Fame on Camden High Street.

Joining UB40 featuring Ali Campbell for the tour will be very special guest, Bitty McLean. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

PHOTO ALEX BARRON HOUGH

MANICS AND SUEDE JOIN FORCES

Manic Street Preachers and Suede are embarking on a joint tour of the UK and Ireland in the summer.

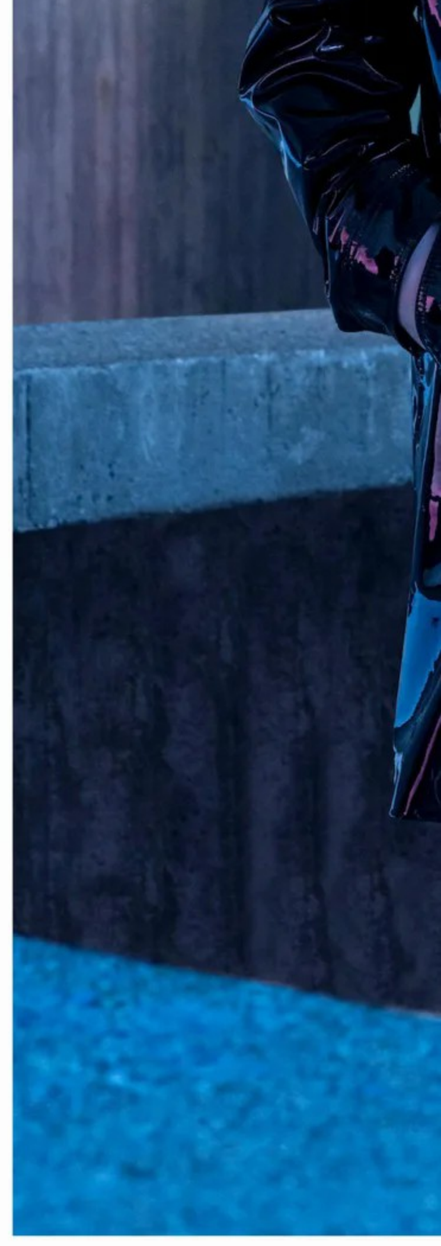
Both bands – who first hit the road on a European trek back in 1993 and last year regrouped for a new run across the US – will revive the shows in June and July.

The run kicks off in Llangollen in Wales on June 28 and plays through July 18, with a final show at London's Alexandra Palace Park.

They will also co-headline at the Eden Sessions on June 29 as part of the series of performances.

Both bands will take turns closing the concerts. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

PHOTOS DEAN CHALKLEY AND ALEX LAKE



Lemar gets closer

Lemar is set to hit the road with his 'Closer Tour' arriving at venues across the UK in the spring.

The *Dance (With U)* hitmaker will deliver hits, fan-favourites, and tracks from his latest album, 'Page In My Heart' during the eight-show run, which sees the star accompanied by his live band.

Launching in Gateshead on April 5, the run hits Leeds, Southend-On-Sea, Bristol, Manchester, Edinburgh and Birmingham, before finishing in London at the Adelphi Theatre on April 16.

On the tour, Lemar says: "I had so much fun this year celebrating 20 years that I've decided to let the celebrations continue for a little longer, and get even closer with my fans.

"More reminiscing to be done... more songs to be sung! Really looking forward to it. Come join me!"

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO ANGELIC MEDIA / J.HOBBS

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

PET SHOP BOYS IN DREAMWORLD

Pet Shop Boys will be back out on the road throughout the summer with the latest set of their 'Dreamworld' greatest hits shows.

The duo have already played concerts across the UK and globally as part of the run, which was originally announced in 2020 and finally commenced two years later.

Following hugely-successful stints in 2022 and 2023, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe will continue to celebrate their catalogue with five new dates.

Launching June 4 in Glasgow, the pair will play in Nottingham, Birmingham and Manchester, before wrapping in Belfast on June 11 – their first show there since 1991.

They'll also headline Isle Of Wight festival later that month. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

PHOTO PHIL FISK

THE MONDAYS ARE BACK

The Happy Mondays will return to the road with their 'Been There Done That Tour' hitting venues across the UK next spring.

Shaun Ryder, Bez, Rowetta, Mark Day, Gary Whelan and Dan Broad will perform the band's classic hits, such as *24 Hour Party People*, *Step On*, *Hallelujah*, *Loose Fit*, *Judge Fudge*, *W.F.L* and *Kinky Afro*, during the 16-date run, which launches March 14 in Glasgow.

Of the shows, Shaun Ryder says: "We're really looking forward to the Happy Mondays' first headline tour for five years. We'll be playing all the hits for everyone, so it's going to be a lot of fun. See you there!"

"Can't wait to get out on tour with Happy Mondays. Shake your maracas in the air like you just don't care," comments Bez.

Rowetta adds: "Me and my voice can't wait to sing all across the UK for a tour to remember."

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO PAUL HUSBAND

THE HUMAN LEAGUE ARENA RUN

The Human League will embark on an arena tour of the UK in December.

Philip Oakey, Joanne Catherall and Susan Anne Sulley will play seven shows across the country as part of their 'Generations' run, with Sophie Ellis-Bextor and T'Pau to join as special guests.

Launching in Cardiff on December 5, the tour will take in Birmingham, Brighton, Bournemouth, Glasgow and Leeds, before wrapping at London's OVO Arena Wembley on December 14.

Before then, they're heading Down Under in March for a run of 'Dare!' shows, featuring the iconic album played in full plus all the hits. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

Blancmange bring their best

Blancmange will return to the road for their first-ever best-of tour, celebrating 45 years since they formed in 1979.

Kicking off in Newcastle on May 16, the 11-date run will head to a string of major cities across the UK and include a show at London's Islington Assembly Hall, as well as a Scottish date in Glasgow.

The tour is to be a celebration of the band's enduring creativity and versatility, showcasing classic singles like *Feel Me*, *Living On The Ceiling*, *Blind Vision* and *Don't Tell Me*, along with material from the 10 albums released in the past decade. **Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.**

PHOTO HELEN KINCAID

GLORIOUS SADNESS FOR PALOMA FAITH

Paloma Faith is back with news of her sixth studio album, 'The Glorification Of Sadness', and a tour of the UK throughout the spring.

Due February 16, the LP is the follow-up to 2020's 'Infinite Things' and features collaborations with Chase & Status, Kojey Radical, Maverick Sabre, Lapsley, MJ Cole, Fred Cox, Amy Wadge, Liam Bailey and Jaycen Joshua.

Its lead single, the bombastic *How You Leave A Man*, is out now.

In support of the LP, Faith will embark on a UK tour, which is set to begin on April 3 at The Hexagon in Reading and conclude at Swansea Arena on May 18.

She will also perform at Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod in Wales on June 21 and Lincoln Castle on June 22.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Barry Manilow's fond farewell

Barry Manilow is heading to the capital one last time for his farewell London Palladium residency.

The One Voice singer will play nine shows between May 23 and June 9 at the iconic venue, having increased the run due to "overwhelming demand".

They will be his last-ever UK concerts.

"In 1978, The London Palladium is where I began my love affair with the British public," he says. "These shows will be my last full concerts in Britain and I wanted to end where I began – at the London Palladium."

Manilow will kick off the run with a one-off show at the new Manchester Co-Op Live arena on May 19.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

DEFINITELY MAYBE 30

Liam Gallagher is celebrating 30 years since the release of Oasis' seminal 1994 debut album, 'Definitely Maybe', with a summer arena tour.

The group's frontman will play venues across the UK in celebration of the milestone, playing the LP in full along with B-sides from the era and classics from the band's catalogue.

It will also be a rare opportunity to see tracks from the period live on stage, including *Up In The Sky* and *Digsy's Dinner*.

Liam says: "I'm bouncing around the house to announce the 'Definitely Maybe Tour'. The most important album of the '90s bar none. I wouldn't be anywhere without it and neither would you, so let's celebrate together LG x"

The 12-date tour includes three nights at Manchester's Co-Op Live, which will be the biggest arena in the country when it opens next May, as well as three shows at The O2 in London.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO JILL FURMANOVSKY

JLS' SUMMER OF HITS

JLS are heading back to the stage for their extensive 'Summer Hits' tour.

The run will see Aston Merrygold, JB Gill, Marvin Humes and Oritsé Williams play open-air shows across the UK, packed with hits like *Beat Again*, *Everybody In Love* and *One Shot*, plus all the usual slick choreography.

JB says: "Ah wow! The response to our 'Everybody Say JLS - The Hits' tour has been so incredible from all our JLSters that it was a no brainer for us to announce summer dates for 2024!

"We LOVE touring in the summer, especially as we get to meet fans in parts of the country that DON'T usually host us in the arenas. It's been a while too - another UK summer road trip with your boys?! Dare you to name anything more exciting than that!"

The shows launch on June 28 in Newmarket and continue through August 31 for Yorkshire's Wild Nights Live. Stops include Margate's Dreamland, the Eden Sessions and London's Kew The Music.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The Fizz return to indigo

The Fizz are going back to the indigo at The O2 stage for a summer headline show.

Original Bucks Fizz members Cheryl Baker, Mike Nolan and Jay Aston will deliver hits from across the decades during the one-off gig on June 28.

Alongside classics from the band's original album series, they'll also perform tracks from their recent Mike Stock-produced collections, 'The F-Z Of Pop' (2017), 'Smoke & Mirrors' (2020) and 'Everything Under The Sun' (2022).

Supporting are special guests Ultimate Earth Wind & Fire.

Tickets are on sale now.

PHOTO MPG

KEANE TURN 20

Keane will release a special remastered version of their classic debut album, 'Hopes And Fears' (2004), in celebration of its 20th anniversary.

Due May 10 – exactly 20 years after its initial release – the remastered re-release features the UK Top 10 hit singles *Somewhere Only We Know*, *Everybody's Changing* and *Bedshaped*, with the original LP selling over 10 million copies worldwide.

Lead singer Tom Chaplin says: "I remember standing by that amazing old mixing desk at Heliocentric Studios where we made 'Hopes And Fears', listening to an early mix of *Somewhere Only We Know*. I had this feeling that we'd come up with something that had an extra bit of magic.

"Making music is so often a process full of doubt... but on this occasion there was something undeniable about what we'd created. Clearly a lot of people felt the same when the album came out!"

Founding band member and songwriter Tim Rice-Oxley adds: "When I think about these songs, I still picture us playing them in little rooms in pubs around the UK. I remember how exciting it was watching the crowds start to grow.

"Those songs opened the door to another dimension for us; everything that has happened in our lives since then was born out of that moment. It's an incredible privilege for us that people are still listening after all this time."

Coinciding with the release, the band will embark on a World Tour, launching April 1 in Mexico City before reaching Europe and the UK. Their US tour in September includes dates at LA's Greek Theatre, Nashville's Ryman Auditorium and New York City's Radio City Music Hall.

Support comes from The Sherlocks & The Lathums.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO ALEX LAKE

BUSTED GO BIG

Busted have announced a run of outdoor gigs for the summer as their chart-topping comeback continues.

Following their hugely-successful 2023 arena tour of the UK, in support of their 'Greatest Hits 2.0' album, the group will perform a series of huge shows in July and August.

Starting on July 11 at Leeds' Millennium Square, the band will then make stops in Newmarket, Newton Le Willows, Margate and Hitchin, before wrapping in Scarborough on August 31.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO R.A.CLIFFE

SIMPLE MINDS GO GLOBAL

Simple Minds are returning to stages across the UK and Ireland for the spring leg of their 'Global Tour'.

Following the huge success of 2022's '40 Years Of Hits Tour' and the band's recent Top 10 LP, 'Direction Of The Heart', the group will play a run of arena dates launching March 15 in Leeds and playing through March 29 in Glasgow.

"Concerts are the lifeblood of Simple Minds, it's where we and our audience come alive and energised through music," says frontman Jim Kerr. "Four decades on from when we first set out, this global tour will demonstrate that Simple Minds are still alive and kicking!"

As already announced, prior to their UK and Ireland tour, Simple Minds will headline the 'Summer Concert Tour' in New Zealand – performing in Taupo, Hamilton and Gibbston – and Australia's Red 'Hot Summer Tour', playing Mornington, Rochford Winery, Sandstone and Kings Park.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO DEAN CHALKLEY

Lightning Seeds' 35th anniversary

Celebrating 35 years of hits, the Lightning Seeds have announced a massive 17 date UK tour and 20-track greatest hits album.

Arriving October 4, 'Tomorrow's Here Today: 35 Years of Lightning Seeds' kicks off with their debut single, *Pure*, and encompasses classics such as *The Life Of Riley*, *Change*, *Lucky You*, *3 Lions* and more.

In support of the LP, the group will play a string of shows throughout November and December, launching November 8 in Sheffield and playing through December 14 in Wolverhampton.

Ian Broudie says: "Wow, I can't believe it's been 35 years! Our first single 'Pure' really opened the door to a life's worth of songs, shows and recordings.

"I owe everything to *Pure* and I'm really looking forward to celebrating the 35th anniversary of its release with 'Tomorrow's Here Today: 35 Years of Lightning Seeds' greatest hits album and tour in 2024."

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO PETER ASHWORTH

FIGHTSTAR TAKE ON WEMBLEY

Fightstar will play their biggest ever headline show – and their first gig in over eight years, celebrating the band's 20th anniversary – at the OVO Arena Wembley on March 22.

Fronted by Busted's Charlie Simpson, the group landed their UK Top 10 breakthrough, *Paint Your Target*, back in 2005 and scored a pair of Top 20 albums with 'Be Human' (2009) and 'Behind The Devil's Back' (2015).

Almost a decade since they last performed together, the band – also starring Alex Westaway (guitar), Dan Haigh (bass) and Omar Abidi (drums) – will take the stage in London to celebrate their latest milestone.

"[2024] marks 20 years since Fightstar played our first show in a tiny nightclub in Northampton, mainly in front of friends and family," says Charlie. "To be sat here today about to play our biggest ever headline show at London's legendary Wembley Arena is something that is hard for us to comprehend.

"We are so thankful to all our fans who have been so loyal to us and we can't wait to celebrate this milestone with them. This will be a very special night for all of us."
Tickets are on sale now.

PHOTO CHAZZ ADNITT

Goodbye, Gladys Knight

Gladys Knight will return to the UK stage one final time as she prepares to embark on her 'Farewell Tour'.

The Empress Of Soul – who began her career in the 1950s performing with The Pips and went on to garner an iconic songbook including *Help Me Make It Through The Night*, *Licence To Kill* and *The Way We Were* – will launch the run on June 24 in Glasgow.

She'll take in Birmingham, Swansea, Bournemouth, Nottingham and Southend, among which a date at London's Royal Albert Hall takes place on June 27.

For the shows, Knight will be joined by special guest Mica Millar, who has quickly become one of the UK's most exciting soul stars and has supported artists including Lionel Richie and Gregory Porter.
Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

INTERNATIONAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK

OMD will hit the road for a UK and European tour in support of their latest album, 'Bauhaus Staircase'.

Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys will launch the shows on January 22 at the Rockefeller in Oslo, Norway before making their way across cities including Stockholm, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Warsaw, Prague, Belfast, Paris, Dublin and more.

In March, they'll return to the UK with a first stop at Manchester's O2 Apollo, heading on to Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow, Nottingham, Wolverhampton, Bristol, Oxford and Brighton, before wrapping in Eastbourne on March 27.

Amid the run, they'll play a one-off date at The O2, London – supported by Howard Jones – on March 24.

"We are so excited to be able to tour again with a brand new album to showcase," says McCluskey. "It's been six years since we learned new songs for live performances.

"The songs from 'Bauhaus Staircase' will fit beautifully into our setlist – we just have to choose which five to play, as we have to treat people to the hits as well!"
Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO ED MILES

INTRODUCING... ONES TO WATCH

Every year we're introduced to countless rising stars making their bid to change the pop landscape - and the stakes are high! With so many platforms to share their music, there's never been so much competition to be seen and heard in the industry, but whether it's years, months or decades, it's all to play for in the climb to the top. This month, we're spotlighting seven acts we've got our eye on for 2024; some have just emerged on the scene, others have been working at it for years, but what they all have in common is talent, determination - and some bloody good tracks in their catalogues, too!

ALEXIS
STRUM

BENEDICT
CORK

BRYN
CHRISTOPHER

SAMIRA

LAUREN
SPENCER-
SMITH

INTRODUCING...

LAUREN SPENCER-SMITH

Having broken into the global charts with her TikTok hit, *Fingers Crossed*, **Lauren Spencer-Smith**'s career is only on the up!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

She may have just turned 20 but Lauren Spencer-Smith is no stranger to the pop charts.

The British-born Canadian-raised vocal powerhouse has been blowing up over the last couple of years since her hit single, *Fingers Crossed*, went viral and topped the charts around the world, months after she premiered the song on TikTok.

"I posted *Fingers Crossed* right after I wrote it and then for about two months it was all over TikTok - but I still hadn't put it out [to buy or stream]," she laughs. "Everybody was getting mad at me, but it was definitely at a time at the beginning of TikTok where you could do that because people weren't really using it to put out original music."

Today, she has 6.5 million followers on the platform alone and back in 2021 when she shared the song - which went Top 5 in the UK and Top 20 in the US - the teen had already amassed a significant following thanks to her appearance on season 18 of 'American Idol' a year prior, where she made it to the Top 20 but was eliminated during the first week of remote shows.

It's not an experience she regrets.

"I purposefully went on the show knowing that there probably were going to be people more talented than me - I just needed to use it to get my name out there and build a following, which definitely worked to my benefit," she shrugs. "So I wasn't having mental breakdowns when I was kicked off the show because I knew the whole time that there was a chance I was not going to win, so I just made the best of it."

> I wrote my first album with a lot of people that I'm close to and we kind of stayed in that group, so I think it would be really cool to incorporate some other people into that group

Long before she got to performing for Luke Bryan, Katy Perry and Lionel Richie - plus the whole of America - Lauren knew music was her path. "I was obsessed with music when I was a kid, ever since I was like three years old, and I would do performances in the living room," she smiles. "I knew I wanted to be a singer by the time I was five."

What did her repertoire look like? "I was obsessed with singing *Firework* by Katy Perry - that was a very go-to song for me when I was five," she laughs. "But when I was eight, I really got into Adele, who is my biggest inspiration in music.

"I'm sure my family hates me! Constantly, my brother would be like, 'Shut up!'. People would ask me to be quiet and I'd be like, 'Yes, I'm so sorry, you're doing homework.' And then I would forget and start singing again. Honestly, now that I'm older I'm like, 'Why were you guys supportive of this?' Because how I sounded when I was eight years old is not how I sound now. But my parents have been supportive of everything I wanted to do since I was young."

When *Fingers Crossed* started getting traction and leapt to the top of the download charts, it wasn't long before the teen, whose family is based in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, found herself jetting to the US to follow her musical ambitions. "Within two days, I was flying to New York and I didn't come home for two months," she recalls. "I was meeting with industry people and labels and all these different things. Doing promo runs for the song and going into radio stations. My life really did go from zero to 100."

When it came to switching things up a gear, the young singer-songwriter was "very prepared" to go into meetings and say: "This is what I want my project to be and this is what I want it to sound like." "As a kid, I watched every single documentary and every video that existed on the Internet, so I was like, 'I got this, I'm prepared for this'. But I've always been very business-minded and I knew what I wanted when it came to my music and who I wanted to be as an artist," she insists.

"I felt like it was more fun. It was

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

more exciting. I just felt like something had finally worked, because I'd posted probably thousands of videos on the Internet at that point, so for something to finally go off - I was just excited!"

Over the summer, Lauren finally released her debut album, the gut-wrenching breakup LP 'Mirror', which went Top 20 on the UK Albums Chart. Of the project, she mused at the time: "I've been working on this album for years. It has been with me through so much in my life, the highs and the lows, and it means more to me than I can put into words. It tells a story of reflection, healing and growth.

"I went through a hard breakup, and the album tells the story of that all, the journey of that and now being in a more happy relationship. The title comes from the one thing in my life that's seen me in every emotion through that journey - my bedroom and bathroom mirror."

Now, she's planning to return to the studio and set to work on its follow-up, keen to explore new possibilities with a wider group of collaborators, including fellow Canadian JP Saxe. "He's my main inspiration for songwriting. When I was a kid I didn't pay as much attention when it came to lyrics, but when I was 16 I really started only focusing on lyrics and not melodies, and it was his music that took me in that direction and got me really into songwriting," she smiles.

"I'm really excited to branch out. I wrote my first album with a lot of people that I'm close to and we kind of stayed in that group, so I think it would be really cool to incorporate some other people into that group."

Naturally, when it comes to the next 12 months there's one thing on Lauren's mind: "A lot of songwriting!" She chuckles: "I go live on Instagram and everybody's like, 'Where's the second album?' And it hasn't even been six months. But people are already wanting new music from me, so I'm definitely just gonna go in the studio..." **RP**

● ***'Mirror' is out now on Island/ Republic.***

INTRODUCING...

BENEDICT CORK

With a collection of EPs under his belt and approval from the likes of Elton John and Adam Lambert, singer-songwriter **Benedict Cork** is set to unleash his long-awaited debut album!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

Over the five years he's been releasing music, Benedict Cork has supported Adam Lambert, played to a packed Hyde Park and amassed over 300,000 monthly Spotify listeners - and now he's finally set to release his first LP.

"I really enjoyed doing EPs because you can play around with sounds and genres," reflects the singer-songwriter. "With an album, it's a statement - like your first novel or your first movie or something - but with EPs you can dance around a little bit."

He's definitely kept moving; Cork's first solo release, 2018's 'Piano Tapes', was recorded at Red Gate Recorders in Eagle Rock, California and attracted the attention of Elton John, who called him "sensational" and "a name to look out for", after which he launched a residency at London's Fiction Studios in 2019, the same year he appeared at the city's British Summer Time festival,, supporting Stevie Wonder and Lionel Richie.

What seemed like an overnight success was the product of years of working in London piano bars, after he left school and relocated to the capital with a dream of making music. "That's how I was able to survive in London," he laughs. "I shared a room with my friend - two beds in the same room - and she was an actress, so we were like, 'We're gonna make this work'. She'd go off to auditions and I'd play the piano bars at night, and that was my bread and butter for two or three years."

When he began to branch out and collaborate with other up-and-coming musicians, Cork found himself a manager and soon landed a publishing deal. "That's when I started really thinking hard, like 'I really want to do this as an artist and put out my own stuff'," he smiles.

For years, he'd been writing material but had shied away from showing anybody: "Even when I left school and I said to my parents that I wanted to be a musician, I did it in a way that was a bit like, 'Oh, I just want to try this' - when actually, deep down, I've always loved music and I've always wanted to sing songs and play shows."

> With an album, it's a statement - like your first novel or your first movie or something - but with EPs you can dance around a little bit.

It's been a therapy of sorts for the singer-songwriter, whose lyrics cover subjects from mental health and sexuality to life in the public eye during the digital age. But the origins of his very first song weren't so profound; after being snubbed from the guest list of his friend's birthday party, the then-15-year-old penned his first track, *The Girl With The Coldest Eyes*. "I sang it at gigs for three or four years afterwards and it was so dramatic - like something out of an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical," he laughs. "It was really bad - I've found clips of it since and it's just as bad as you'd think it might be!"

The themes may have progressed but Cork's desire to write from a personal angle has remained constant; so in 2021, when he released his 'Secrets I'll Never Tell' EP, the project was accompanied by a series of podcasts by the same name, featuring frank and open conversations with several collaborators including Adam Lambert, MNEK and Duncan Laurence.

"It was during lockdown and I was here on my own, very bored, and when I'm bored I get quite sad," he recalls. "I had this collection of songs that was finished and they were going to be put out, but I wanted to do something special that went alongside it. I realised that, because it was lockdown, people I've met over the years who are normally super busy were also just sitting in their houses bored, so I reached out to them and said, 'Hey, I want to do this podcast miniseries, would you mind having a phone call with me?' And that's how I put it together."

The initial release consisted of seven episodes, with Cork compelled to put together a bonus edition after hearing from fans online who were happy to share their own stories. "That was actually the most rewarding one, because when you're releasing songs or releasing a podcast you don't know if anyone's ever gonna listen to it," he admits, "so to hear these really personal stories from people was actually really beautiful. It made a very boring and sad time quite fun!"

When the world opened up, he was ready to dive into writing and recording songs for what will be his first album,

PHOTO MOJA

due in 2024, which brings together the sounds he's dabbled in over the past half-decade - plus some new influences too. "I love people like Tom Odell, Maggie Rogers and Kacey Musgraves, but then I also love Tove Lo, Charli XCX and Dagny - I love Scandi pop - so it's kind of like meshing them all into my own little melting pot of musical stuff."

Another track he namechecks is Cornelia Jakobs' 2022 Eurovision entry, *Hold Me Closer*, but would the brother of the UK's 2018 entrant, SuRie, ever make his own bid for ESC victory? "It wasn't even on my radar until she did it, but that year we went and watched it and I got so caught up in the atmosphere - it's insane, but amazing," he grins. "I don't know if I'd ever do it myself, just because it's just such a big undertaking - it's bigger than the Super Bowl, you're performing to 150 million people! Right now, my sole focus is getting the album out and enjoying that, because it's been almost two years in the making now, but never say never - talk to me in five years' time and who knows where I'll be..."

Singing for Europe might not be on his immediate to-do list, however writing for the West End is more within his sights. "This week I've been working with a theatre writer called Katie Arnstein and it's been the most liberating thing ever," he says. "I love pop music so much, but sometimes you go into a pop session and they want it to be three and a half minutes, it can't have *this* chord or *these* lyrics are *too* honest. But we've just been throwing out random shit and it's been so fun.

"So one day - not any day soon, because I'm a little busy right now - I'd like to write a musical with somebody. I don't know who, but it'd be a vibe!" **RP**

● ***Soulmates is out now. Benedict Cork's debut album is due in 2024.***

INTRODUCING...

SAMIRA

With a series of winning pop bangers under her belt, **Samira** is ready to build on a fruitful 12 months as she goes all-in to 2024!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

British rising star Samira is the new pop girl on the block.

The south London independent singer-songwriter launched her debut solo single, *Like This, Like That*, early in 2023 and followed it up with a run of huge bangers, including *Envy Me* and her recent single, *Toxic*.

"I love 2000s music, that's my thing," she beams, touching upon her musical influences. "Whenever I'm doing anything, the 2000s playlist is on. I grew up with people like Rihanna, Lady Gaga, Britney Spears - I love the big pop girlies. JLo, onstage, back in the day - I would love to have seen that!"

Her latest release is written with Kal Lavelle (Ed Sheeran), Tancrede Rouff and Theo Douke, and centres on the push and pull of an emotionally abusive relationship. The confessional lyrics, paired with an irresistible strutting club beat, is shaping up to be Samira's wheelhouse.

"*Toxic* is one of my favourite babies – it's fun, flirty and sassy, but underneath the gloss it's actually quite sad, tackling the important question of, 'Why do we put up with bad behaviour in relationships, and what makes us go back to those situations?'" she says of the song.

On the process of pouring her emotions into her lyrics, the performer adds: "Each session is different because of whoever's in the room. I love it because we all talk about our experiences, what we're going to write about, and I do love to connect the songs with my own life. I wear my heart on my sleeve and I love that my songs are a little bit of a diary entry."

The lyrics might cut to the heart, but you can be sure they'll be wrapped up in dance floor friendly beats - resulting in what Samira calls 'Sad Girl Hot Pop Songs'. "It's like, 'OK, the song is actually very vulnerable and she's telling you something quite sad, but I'm still dancing to it...'" she laughs. "That kind of vibe, I love it!"

It's a far cry from her performance beginnings; as a child, Samira took ballet classes before branching out into different styles and later entering the world of musical theatre. While both were highly disciplined, at the same time she discovered a knack for songwriting when her mum bought her a piano and she began transforming journal entries into pop songs.

When she was 15, she auditioned for 'The X Factor' - "I queued up for 17 hours and sang Pixie Lott's *Broken Arrow* about five keys too high," she chuckles - but the experience didn't deter her from following her pop star dreams and she began to flesh out her identity and who she is as an artist, as opposed to the personas she channelled through dance and theatre.

"My discipline in the music industry is really good. I know things take time and you have to actually put your all into everything - the same as in musical theatre - but it took me a while to get used to the routine of not actually being in a show and playing a character. Finding your sound, what's good for you, what you wear... It's really different."

She adds: "When I used to go out, I used to wear the maddest stuff and just be like: 'It's fine, because I'm going to be a pop star...'. But it is also interesting when you look at my writing style, because if I look back at some of my old books, the music I used to write when I was growing up as a teenager was quite dark and slow."

Look no further than the titles of some of her earliest tracks. "There was one song called *Fake Tears*, which was when I was going through a heartbreak and the boy was like, 'I'm *also* going through a hard time', but nah, the fake tears weren't good enough," she shares. "Another was called *Run A Mile*, which I'm always trying to remember on the piano. That was the best one!"

She's come a long way since then and reflecting on her journey so far, it's the 'firsts' that stand out for Samira. "Doing my first music video was kind of like, 'OK' - I was really grateful because, when you actually look around the room, you've got the people recording it, you've got the choreographer, you've got the dancers. I was like, 'Everyone is here for my vision,' and it's weird that you see things in your head and then see them come to life. It was insane!"

Heading into 2024, Samira will release her debut EP, 'Dancefloors & Drama Vol.1', on January 19, but she's already looking to the future with plans for some big collaborations in the works too. "It would be sick to do something with a big DJ - Calvin Harris or Diplo," she grins. "Or Fred again.., he's unreal. I love a deep house dance track with a vulnerable lyric."

And outside of the studio, she's looking forward to returning to the stage and performing for fans, with headline dates and festival slots over the coming months. "I feel so alive on stage. I feel like that's where I'm meant to be and I cannot wait to showcase what I can do and my songs - and maybe preview some new songs as well," she muses.

"Working with really big producers and writers is the main focus and I think next year is going to be a really big year for me in the sense of festivals as well. Summer is going to be the one!" **RP**

● ***'Dancefloors & Drama Vol.1' is out January 19 on Nightmoves.***

> When I used to go out, I used to wear the maddest stuff and just be like: 'It's fine, because I'm going to be a pop star...'

PHOTO FREDERICK GOFF

ALSO INTRODUCING...

Check out four more fantastic acts set to make waves in 2024, who'll no doubt be returning to the pages of **RETROPOP** very soon!

TYLA

Rising pop princess Tyla's music pushes boundaries, infusing her vibrant personality with a blend of pop and R&B, shimmering with the euphoria of South African amapiano, and an otherworldly approach to production that makes every track feel like something totally new.

The Johannesburg native, who launched with her debut, *Getting Late (feat. Kooldrink)*, in 2019, has steadily risen through the pop ranks and found international success with her 2023 single, *Water*, which was a Top 10 hit globally, including in the UK and Australia, and Top 20 on the US Billboard Hot 100.

She may have more than 28 million Spotify listeners but it's been a long time coming, with Tyla's emotionally rich music beginning when she was just 12, penning songs in her diary, which led to writing and singing more seriously as a high schooler. Ever since, she's been guided by her intuition, which has her primed to build out her fan base and maximise her reach.

Now, she's focused on the year ahead, performing and crafting her debut studio album, with the same intention from when she began; to bring to life her musical ambition and achieve international dominance with style, soul, and spirit.

Her latest hit is nominated for Best African Music Performance at the 2024 Grammys, so the next 12 months are most definitely hers to take.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

NIGHT TAPES

Night Tapes started out as evening jams between housemates Max Doohan, Sam Richards and Iiris Vesik in London, with the genre-blending, multi-fidelity recordings establishing a framework for what was to come.

The group's blend of envelope-pushing dream pop takes inspiration from both their lived experience in the world that they can see and touch, as well as the less tangible spiritual and metaphysical realm, and is set to spill out with the release of their latest EP, featuring the new single, *Drifting*, due soon.

It comes on the back of a fruitful year for the trio, which saw them release their third EP, 'Perfect Kindness', play their SXSW debut in March and wrap up a UK & European tour, with a run of dates that continued to take their sound to new audiences.

And it seems to be a winning formula; the group has over 200,000 monthly listeners on Spotify and their 2019 single, *Forever*, so far has more than seven million streams on the platform alone.

With new music and more live shows in the works for 2024, the group is going from strength to strength and with the rise in '90s-inspired electronic pop in the charts and on the airwaves at the moment, their time is now.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

ALEXIS STRUM

Twenty years since her debut album *should* have come out, 2024 looks to finally be Alexis Strum's year!

The past 12 months has seen the singer-songwriter, who was working in IT after giving up on her pop star dreams, return to the spotlight with the release of her two 'lost' albums - 'Addicted' and 'Cocoon' - and take to the stage in conjunction with **RETROPOP** for An Evening With Alexis Strum.

She's already written for Kylie Minogue (*Still Standing*) and Rachel Stevens (*Nothing Good About This Goodbye*), and having built a Spotify following of over 25,000 listeners in the space of months, things are only on the up.

"If you'd told little 25 year old me, just after losing her deal with UMG, that in 20 years time her album 'Cocoon' would FINALLY come out and she'd be singing those songs to a packed London crowd, she'd have thought you were insane," she says. "The point is, it is never too late. You don't always have to knock on doors till your knuckles bleed either. Sometimes, just sometimes, a little nugget of opportunity comes your way."

Having returned to writing and with plans to head back into the studio, her time is now. "This time last year I was working in IT and had given up," Alexis adds. "I was 45. I thought this is it and that was that. I'm not saying I'm going to take over the world now, but I'm finding my place in the universe - watch this space!"

PHOTO CHRIS FOX

BRYN CHRISTOPHER

Bryn Christopher is ready for his next chapter. After building a reputation as British pop's secret weapon by writing hits for the biggest names in music, the Birmingham-born vocal powerhouse is now stepping firmly into the spotlight.

Having made his chart debut on Sigala's *Sweet Lovin'*, which peaked at No. 3 in the UK back in 2015, he's become a creative mainstay in the industry, co-writing 2017's *Came Here for Love* featuring Ella Eyre and working with Melanie C on her reflective 2020 comeback single, *Who I Am*.

Now, he's back with his new single, *High*, which he wrote and recorded with DJ-producers Jodie Harsh and Laconic, offering a deeply personal lyric on his journey towards self-acceptance.

"When I sing *'I prayed and it didn't work'*, that's me looking back at a time when I really, really didn't want to be gay," he recalls. "My partner has told me he felt exactly the same way when he was younger – as I think so many gay kids do – so this song means a lot to both of us."

Happily, Bryn's journey has since come full-circle. "Obviously now as an adult, I'm really proud of being gay," he adds. "It isn't all that I am, but I do think it has helped to shape me as a person and an artist. And it can give me a very unique perspective in songwriting sessions."

Looking to the next 12 months, his main objective is "to build a real legacy" as a performer and there's lots of new music coming right through into 2024. "I will always love collaborating with producers and writing for other artists," he smiles, "but now it's about getting out there as Bryn Christopher again."

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

92

THAT! FEELS GOOD!

Jessie Ware is every inch the superstar on the final stop of her world tour!

PHOTO CARSTEN WINDHURST

80 ALBUMS

Alison Goldfrapp, Bryan Adams, The Killers, Peter Gabriel, Rebecca Ferguson

86 REISSUES

ABBA, Aretha Franklin, The Corrs, Duran Duran, Depeche Mode, Fiona Apple, Nelly Furtado, R.E.M., Sheryl Crow, Siobhan Donaghy, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Suede

RATINGS EXPLAINED: ★★★★★ BRILLIANT ★★★★☆ STRONG ★★★☆☆ GOOD ★★☆☆☆ AVERAGE ★☆☆☆☆ POOR

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

REBECCA FERGUSON
HEAVEN, PT. II
★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 5**
Minerva Oto
FORMATS: **CD, Standard Black Vinyl**

One of the finest British voices to emerge in the 21st century, Rebecca Ferguson strikes gold on her fifth studio album, 'Heaven, Pt. II'.

The first LP from the Liverpudlian star, who rose to fame as a contestant on 'The X Factor' in 2010, in seven years and her first release as an independent artist, the record arrives 12 years to the day since her debut, 'Heaven', and documents her journey towards inner peace and creative freedom.

'As long as I can put some food on the table / I know we're gonna be OK / I'm just surviving by the skin of my teeth', she sings on album opener, *Digging For Gold*, shunning all preconceptions of the pop star lifestyle with a raw quality that runs through the set.

Vocally, she's never sounded better and there's a confidence in the delivery that sells each song to the max, often with brooding synthesised undercurrents that add a contemporary edge to the material.

Lyrically, 'Heaven, Pt. II' is also Ferguson's most assured work to date, with personal numbers like *I'm Going To Love You* and *Shallow Breathing* sitting alongside story pieces such as *Diamonds In Her Shoes* and *Hollywood*, showcasing various dimensions of her songwriting with a welcome injection of charming personality.

Bolder and warmer than her previous album, 2017's 'Superwoman', reuniting with collaborators from her first long-player seems to have been a winning move, and while she occasionally finds comfort the influence of new creatives is clear in the development of her sound, more than a decade later.

Ahead of its release, the singer-songwriter billed 'Heaven, Pt. II' as her final release, but given the sheer quality of the material on offer and Rebecca's immense talent - which only seems to grow as the years go by - it would be a crying shame if this really *is* her final release.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

ALISON GOLDFRAPP
THE LOVE REINVENTION
★★★★★

RELEASED: **December 8 *BMG***
FORMATS: **Digital**

Having reemerged earlier this year with her glorious Top 10 solo debut, 'The Love Invention', Alison Goldfrapp revisits the dreamy project for a remix album of epic proportions.

Conceived once again with the help of collaborators Richard X and Ghost Culture (aka James Greenwood), the project reimagines the 11-song set through a sonic prism of techno, electronica and deep house.

"'The Love Reinvention' turns my solo album 'The Love Invention' on its head, its feet are now firmly placed on the dance floor," says Alison of the work, which in addition to revisiting the songs' production also extends each number, all to over five minutes and most between the six and seven marks.

Sequenced like the original LP, 'The Love Reinvention' opens with *Never Stop Loving*, with heavy beats interspersed with shimmering synths and echoes of her wistful vocals, for a vast soundscape that only serves to expand her sonic universe.

The title song picks up the pace and pulses with frantic electronics, while the standout *In Blue* is among the most radio friendly of the remixes yet still adds new dimensions to the track.

What's commendable on 'The Love Reinvention' is the respect given to the original recordings, with the core of the songs still intact and the mixes built around the heart of the original LP, incorporating new themes of Eurodance, Italo disco and Balearic house.

So while *Astral Invitation* and *So Hot So Hard* possess a more exploratory streak with vast extended mixes, there's an immediacy to numbers like the disco stormer *Gateaux & Gelato* and high-octane *Dubterfuge*, both of which hit harder than before.

Whether considered a standalone release or a counterpart to 'The Love Invention', the result is a masterful body of work that breathes new life into an essential album of the past 12 months and continues to showcase Alison Goldfrapp's ascent to solo pop superstar status.

PHOTO MAT MAITLAND

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THE KILLERS
REBEL DIAMONDS
★★☆☆☆

RELEASED: **December 8**
EMI
FORMATS: **CD, 2LP Black Vinyl, 2LP Store Exclusive Black Vinyl, 4LP 45RPM Black Vinyl**

PHOTO TODD WEAVER

Celebrating 20 years of hits, The Killers collect 20 singles from the past two decades on their latest compilation release.

The band's 'Rebel Diamonds' tracks their history in chronology, launching with *Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine*, the opening track from their debut album, 'Hot Fuss' (2004), and is their first album of the sort since 2013's 'Direct Hits'.

"See it's been said that what's remembered lives," says frontman Brandon Flowers of the record, "and we've racked up stadiums full of memories the past twenty years, enough to fill lifetimes. Twenty songs for twenty years – Rebel Diamonds."

Mr Brightside, the song that started it all, is one of several mega-hits on the LP, which also features *Somebody Told Me*, *Human* and *Runaways*, among tracks from the band's seven UK chart-topping albums.

Proving them to be a prolific outfit, just over half of the songs were around the last time the group put out a best-of album, while the other half of the collection is lifted from the more-recent 'Wonderful Wonderful' (2017), 'Imploding The Mirage' (2020) and 'Pressure Machine' (2021), along with last year's *Boy* and the summer single, *Your Side Of Town*.

But with only one previously-unreleased song on the LP - presumably from sessions for the band's scrapped eighth album - it makes for an offering that, although packed with hits, has few additional selling points.

In an era where music's never been so accessible, the traditional greatest hits format has been overtaken by Spotify playlists, with artists relying on added perks such as additional content and bonus rarities to bolster their offerings. Although the anthemic *Spirit* is a neat touch, it's not quite enough to redeem 'Rebel Diamonds', which comes across more as a substitute for the record that fell through than a wholehearted celebration of the group's success to date.

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

PETER GABRIEL
I/O
★★★☆☆

RELEASED: **December 1 *Virgin***
FORMATS: **2CD (Bright-Side Mix+Dark-Side Mix), 2CD+Blu-Ray (Bright-Side Mix+Dark-Side Mix+In-Side Mix), 2LP Black Vinyl (Bright-Side Mix), 2LP Black Vinyl (Dark-Side Mix)**

Presented in dual configurations, 'i/o' is the most curious project of Peter Gabriel's career and an insight into the mind of a musical genius.

Since January 2023, the musician has been releasing a new song from the record on the occasion of every full moon - roughly every four weeks - allowing each single the opportunity to resonate before another follows.

What's more, the Bright-Side and Dark-Side mixes cast different light on the recordings and add to the atmospheric undercurrents on the record, with the former breathing more openly than the darker, more intense other side, which bears more of a tone of urgency.

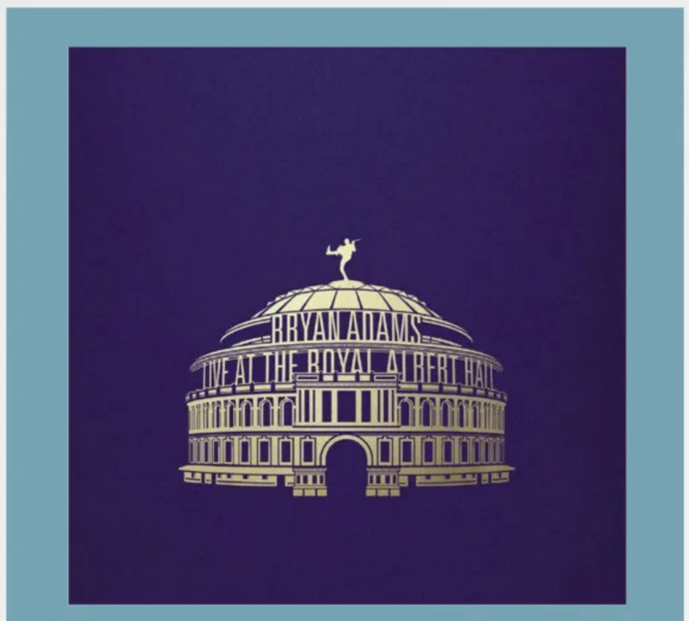
With songs tackling life and the universe, and subject matters including injustice, surveillance and the roots of terrorism, the album itself - a largely mid-tempo and often stripped-back affair, with more a focus on feeling than building vast soundscapes to be admired - is accompanied by a series of artworks that have been released alongside each track, enhancing the offering further.

Of the creative approach and the dual presentation - the Bright-Side Mix handled by Mark 'Spike' Stent and the Dark-Side Mix reshaped by Tchad Blake - Gabriel says: "We have two of the greatest mixers in the world in Tchad and Spike and they definitely bring different characters to the songs. Tchad is very much a sculptor building a journey with sound and drama, Spike loves sound and assembling these pictures, so he's more of a painter."

A lengthy affair - the majority of tracks clock in over five minutes - it's a heavy listen and not one to be undertaken lightly, particularly given the subject matters, which are occasionally a little on the nose and steer the music perhaps more than necessary.

But over a decade since he last released music, 'i/o' feels like less of an album and more a creative project he *needed* to undertake, and in the context of its themes and innovative roll-out, is a testament to Gabriel's enduring artistry.

PHOTO NADAV KANDER



BRYAN ADAMS
LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL
★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 8 *BMG***
FORMATS: **3CD+Blu-Ray Box Set, 4LP+Blu-Ray Box Set**

Bryan Adams brings to life three of his classic albums for a new live release direct from London's Royal Albert Hall.

Recorded in spring 2022, the set captures 'Cuts Like A Knife' (1983), 'Into The Fire' (1987) and 'Waking Up The Neighbours' (1991) in their entirety, featuring classic hits such as *Straight From The Heart*, *Heat Of The Night*, *Everything I Do (I Do It For You)* and *Can't Stop This Thing We Started*.

From the off, the Canadian rocker turns the heat up to 11 as he powers through each set, sticking faithfully to songs from each record while altering the sequence occasionally as befits the demands of the live space.

Vocally, Adams' tone is largely unchanged from the time of each album's original release and he maintains the necessary gousto to belt out anthems like *I'm Ready* and *All I Want Is You*, with the energy of the crowd often bleeding into the recordings, particularly when the chorus hits.

The tightness of the production comes as no surprise, given Adams has spent much of the past two years on the road, but the passion in his delivery is commendable for a musician 45 years into his recording career.

If there's one downside to the release it's that the Blu-Ray counterpart includes only 10 songs - presumably the full concert footage exists and will materialise at some point down the line - but it would have been the cherry on top of an already sweet cake to relive each night on screen too.

There is a 32-page photo book, however, and most exciting of all is that he's returning to the venue in 2024 for another trio of shows, which will no doubt get similar treatment this time next year!

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | **REISSUES** | COMPILATIONS

SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR
KITCHEN DISCO: LIVE AT THE LONDON PALLADIUM
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **December 15**
Cooking Vinyl
FORMATS: **2LP Purple Vinyl**

Sophie Ellis-Bextor's live Kitchen Disco album finally arrives on vinyl for the first time.

Inspired by her hit Instagram Live series that ran throughout the pandemic, the LP includes the pop icon's biggest hits and cover versions as performed during the shows.

Her own classics - such as *Murder On The Dancefloor*, *Heartbreak (Make Me A Dancer)* and *Bittersweet* - sit alongside cover versions including Madonna's *Like A Prayer*, Baccara's *Yes Sir, I Can Boogie* and Annie Lennox's *Walking On Broken Glass* for the complete experience of her vibrant concerts.

Coinciding with the launch of Sophie's 'Christmas Kitchen Disco' run, the LP release was spurred by fan demand and the double-disc set is pressed on purple vinyl, housed in a gatefold sleeve featuring imagery from the shows and behind the scenes snaps from the singer's personal collection.

Content-wise, there's nothing in addition to the first release, but as a package the 'Kitchen Disco: Live At The London Palladium' vinyl edition is sure to please any Sophie fan.

NELLY FURTADO
LOOSE
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **December 1 *Polydor***
FORMATS: **2LP Black Vinyl**

After years of pleading from fans, Nelly Furtado's iconic third album, 'Loose', finally makes its vinyl debut.

The LP saw the *I'm Like A Bird* hitmaker reemerge in 2006 with an all-out pop collection that touches on influences of dance, R&B and hip-hop while exploring more mature themes than her previous offerings.

Featuring the hit singles *Promiscuous*, *Maneater* and *Say It Right*, the vinyl edition clocks in at 13 tracks and - 17 years after it was first released - sounds as fresh today as it did in the mid-'00s.

While international fans are treated to a double-disc red and white set, the UK offering is limited to black wax only - a shame for such a sought-after and anticipated release - but almost two decades later we'll take what we can get at this stage.

In a year that's seen the star finally return to pop and with the promise of more new music on the horizon, there's no better time for Nelly to serve up a reminder of her fine pop credentials.

DURAN DURAN
POP TRASH
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **December 1 *BMG***
FORMATS: **2LP Black Vinyl, 2LP Picture Disc Vinyl**

The 10th studio album from Duran Duran, 'Pop Trash' arrives on vinyl this month and revisits a turning point in the band's career.

Released in 2000, the LP features the single *Someone Else Not Me* and was the last studio record to feature Warren Cuccurullo as a full-time guitarist.

During his tenure, the former Missing Persons star led the group down a path away from the poppier sounds of their early recordings and although it proved a winning direction earlier in the '90s with hits like *Ordinary World*, subsequent recordings struggled to live up to that hype.

Still, as the group reunites with the former member it's an opportune moment to revisit one of their lesser-known LPs in hindsight, with the lively *Mars Meets Venus* and angsty *Starting To Remember* among the stronger tracks that prove Duran Duran still had plenty to give.

Housed in the original album artwork, created by Andrew Day, which features a rhinestone-encrusted car that belonged to Liberace, it's a welcome addition to the Duran Duran collection and, despite the press at the time, not so droll as history would have us believe.

ABBA
THE VISITORS
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **December 1 *UMR***
FORMATS: **2LP Black Vinyl, 4 x 7" Single Picture Discs, 4 x 7" Single Coloured Vinyl Box Set**

ABBA continue to revisit their iconic recordings this month with a reissue of their last album for 40 years.

The Swedish supergroup's eighth LP, 'The Visitors', is remastered across formats, showcasing the original singles series and bringing to life their equally-iconic artwork.

Audio remastered at half-speed offers a new clarity to such classics as *One Of Us* and *When All Is Said And Done* on the 2LP edition, which comes housed in a gatefold sleeve featuring obi-strip and certificate of authenticity.

Meanwhile, additional sets of coloured 7" singles and 7" picture discs revisit individual releases from the era with the original artwork and B-sides.

A neat addition is that of *The Day Before You Came* and *Under Attack* - both of which featured on 'The Singles: The First Ten Years' but never made it onto a studio set.

Four decades on, ABBA's music is timeless and 'The Visitors' is a reminder of the maturity of their later recordings, which bridge the gap between the classic albums and 2021's 'Voyage'.

SHERYL CROW
TUESDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **December 1 *UMR***
FORMATS: **1LP Black Vinyl**

Following her Hall of Fame induction, Sheryl Crow's classic 'Tuesday Night Music Club' makes its vinyl debut.

Featuring the hit singles *All I Wanna Do* and *Leaving Las Vegas*, the 1993 LP closes out its 30th anniversary year with a new reissue, featuring the record in its original configuration.

Also boasting the singles *Run, Baby, Run* and *Strong Enough*, the pressing is the album's first time on wax, with the audio newly-remastered for its latest release.

Housed in a gatefold sleeve, the 11 song set features no additional content, instead remaining faithful to the original edition that helped propel the US star into the global charts.

With a new album on the way in the spring and Crow clearly reinvigorated by music again, the time is right to revisit her brilliant debut.

R.E.M.
UP
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **December 8**
Concord
FORMATS: **2CD, 2CD+Blu-Ray**

The 11th album from R.E.M. is revisited for its 25th anniversary with an expanded reissue comprising a complete audio and visual experience.

The 1998 release, which peaked at No. 2 in the UK and delivered singles such as *Daysleeper*, *Lotus*, *Suspicion* and *At My Most Beautiful*, sees the band in a reflective, moody soundscape, with inspiration drawn from electronic music.

For its latest milestone, the new edition comprises audio - the original album, along with a live set from the band's '99 taping for hit TV series 'Party Of Five' - along with the original visual EPK, 'Uptake Performance' from Ealing Studios, London and remastered music videos.

The live recording is particularly exciting; although the session was common knowledge, it was never confirmed to have been recorded until now.

Together it makes for a strong revisiting of a classic record, veering away from the usual B-sides and demos and instead offering something new and unexpected altogether.

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | **REISSUES** | COMPILATIONS

FIONA APPLE
TIDAL; WHEN THE PAWN...; EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE; THE IDLER WHEEL...

★★★☆☆

RELEASED: **December 8 *Legacy***

FORMATS: **2LP Black Vinyl; 1LP Black Vinyl; 2LP Black Vinyl; 1LP Black Vinyl**

The first four albums from Fiona Apple are reissued on vinyl this month.

'Tidal' (1996), 'When the Pawn...' (1999), 'Extraordinary Machine' (2005) and 'The Idler Wheel...' (2012) document the singer-songwriter's journey from her mid-'90s debut through to the 2010s and showcase her ascent into the Top 5 of the US charts over a period of 16 years.

Although reissues have appeared throughout the years, it's neat to have her catalogue back in circulation on wax on the back of her return with 'Fetch The Bolt Cutters' in 2020, which introduced new generations of fans to her music.

Content-wise there's nothing new, but the music speaks for itself and as a collection Fiona Apple's catalogue is more than worthy of celebrating in this way.

DEPECHE MODE
STRANGE/STRANGE TOO

★★★★★

RELEASED: **December 8 *Sony***

FORMATS: **DVD, Blu-Ray**

Previously available as individual titles in VHS and Laserdisc formats, Depeche Mode's 'Strange' (1988) and 'Strange Too' (1990) are finally back in print.

The short film compilations are lensed by photographer/director Anton Corbijn, in collaboration with Depeche Mode, with the former featuring the first five videos directed by Corbijn, shot entirely in Super 8, and the latter containing an additional six clips.

With the first set in black and white and the latter in colour, both are brought together for the first-time in DVD and Blu-ray configurations and as a single collection, newly restored from original Super 8mm sources, alongside six previously unseen outtake "vignettes" from the DM archives.

When assembling the final edits, Corbijn also created a visual running order where the individual music videos are perceived as one continuous film, with additional interstitial content not seen in the original clips, making the new edition a real coup for fans both familiar and new to the visual world of Depeche Mode.

THE CORRS
BEST OF THE CORRS

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 1 *East/West***

FORMATS: **2CD, 2LP Gold Vinyl**

The classic best-of collection from one of Ireland's most successful acts, The Corrs, is newly-expanded for its latest reissue.

Originally arriving in 2001, the LP covers the band's first three hugely successful studio albums: 'Forgiven Not Forgotten' (1995), 'Talk On Corners' (1997) and 'In Blue' (2000).

Alongside singles such as *Breathless*, *Runaway*, *What Can I Do* and *Radio*, the album now features three new songs recorded in tribute to Fleetwood Mac's Christine McVie.

Following her passing in 2022, the band have recorded new versions of *Little Lies*, *Everywhere* and *Songbird*, produced by Guy Chambers, which feature alongside the group's hit '90s cover of *Dreams*.

Presented in gatefold packaging replicating the original artwork, the addition of new material is a neat touch - even though some of their subsequent hits would have been nice too - but what really stands out is the timelessness of the band's music and Andrea Corr's stunning vocal, which is, as it always was, sublime.

ARETHA FRANKLIN
PORTRAIT OF THE QUEEN: 1970-1974

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 1 *BMG***

FORMATS: **5CD, 6LP Box Set**

Featuring five classic albums from the early '70s and bonus material of session alternates, outtakes, B-sides and demos, 'Portrait Of The Queen' shines a light on five years of work from Aretha Franklin.

Encompassing the albums 'This Girl's In Love With You' (1970), 'Spirit In The Dark' (1970), 'Young Gifted And Black' (1972), 'Hey Now Hey (The Other Side Of The Sky)' (1973) and 'Let Me In Your Life' (1974) - all of which have been remastered from the analog master tapes, the set offers just a snapshot of a career spanning 38 albums.

Primarily boasting her work with Tom Dowd, Arif Mardin and Jerry Wexler - except for 'Hey Now Hey (The Other Side Of The Sky)', which saw Aretha work with Quincy Jones - it also features the first commercial release of The Beatles' *Let It Be*, two months before the Fab Four put out the track.

Packaged in a clamshell box with the original artwork and extensive sleeve notes, it's a fitting and comprehensive celebration that will, hopefully, lead to wider reissues from across her catalogue.

SUEDE
AUTOFICTION (EXPANDED)

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 8 *BMG***

FORMATS: **3CD**

The latest album from Suede is revisited one year on with a host of added content.

'Autofiction' peaked at No. 2 on the charts last year and saw the band deliver their strongest release in decades, marking Suede's highest-charting LP since 1999's 'Head Music'. Accompanying the original album on the special limited edition 3CD release are B-sides and additional album session material, as well as an 'Autofiction' live album recorded on their March 2023 UK tour.

Happily, the set brings together tracks that were only available digitally for a limited period during its initial release, with their inclusion on a physical release a strong plus.

The six additional songs appear alongside an 11-track live album, featuring the entire original tracklist replicated in a performance setting and showcasing their live credentials ahead of next years' tour dates.

Just when it seemed Suede's 'Autofiction' era was over the reissue is a curveball, but loaded with brilliant bonus tracks it's one we're happy to catch.

SIOBHAN DONAGHY
REVOLUTION IN ME

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 8 *London***

FORMATS: **2CD, 1LP Green Vinyl**

The debut solo album from Sugababes original Siobhan Donaghy is expanded and finally out on vinyl for its 20th anniversary.

Featuring the singles *Overrated* and *Twist Of Fate* and executive produced by Cameron McVey, the project was met with a lukewarm response upon its original release but with the passing of time it, along with follow-up 'Ghosts' (2007), has found wider acclaim and become a firm fan favourite.

For its latest milestone, the album not only makes its debut on wax with a stunning green pressing, but CD editions are packaged with an additional disc containing 16 bonus tracks, including B-sides, alternate takes and rarities.

Of them, the pre-release track *Pop Illusion* speaks directly to the singer-songwriter's experience at the time and references Sugababes' debut single, *Overload*, with a new remix courtesy of Luke Mornay incorporating fresh beats.

For an album that didn't make too much noise the first time around, it's rare to get a reissue that collects readily available material, so for 'Revolution In Me' to receive such a carefully-curated set is a joy.

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

NOW PRESENTS DISCO

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 8 Sony**
FORMATS: **5LP Purple Vinyl**

'NOW Presents Disco' collects 80 classic anthems from the genre for a showcase of a moment in time that's come to characterise the charts for years to come.

Donna Summer's seminal *I Feel Love* launches the set, which encompasses anthems like Candi Staton's *Young Hearts Run Free* and Chaka Khan's solo debut *I'm Every Woman*, spotlighting a generation of divas who defined the genre.

Alongside 'Saturday Night Fever' gems like *Disco Inferno*, *More Than A Woman* and *If I Can't Have You* are staples like Elton John's *Are You Ready For Love?* and Baccara's *Yes Sir, I Can Boogie*, while Boney M.'s *Daddy Cool* and Village People's *In The Navy* both showcase the flamboyance of the era.

Presented across five LPs, 'NOW Presents Disco' continues to cast light on acts such as Cher and Diana Ross, who successfully transitioned to disco for particular eras of their careers, while Giorgio Moroder productions for Sparks with *Beat The Clock* and The Three Degrees with *Givin' Up Givin' In* honour his contribution to the genre.

Closing with Thelma Houston's defining anthem, *Don't Leave Me This Way*, it's a fantastic overview of the genre for longtime fans and a perfect entry point for anyone just exploring the joys of disco.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL 40 YEARS

★★★★★

RELEASED: **November 24 Sony**
FORMATS: **40 Years - 4CD, 3LP Coloured Vinyl; Decades - 3CD, 3LP Coloured Vinyl**

Celebrating a four decade legacy that continues to deliver the goods, NOW Music takes a trip down memory lane with a selection of the best from 40 years of NOW.

An extended series of releases sees the brand dip into the archives with compilations celebrating each 10 years between 1983 and 2003, spread across four volumes, spotlighting the biggest and best releases of each era.

As with the ongoing 'Yearbook' series, these new editions come in 'hard-back-book' packaging, including a 26-page booklet featuring a summary of the era, a track-by-track guide, a quiz, plus original singles and NOW artwork, while triple-vinyl editions are pressed on coloured wax in line with the scheme of each set.

Collectively, there's over 250 tracks across all four editions, while 'NOW That's What I Call 40 Years' presents 100 tracks across five CDs, offering highlights from the origins of the brand to now, and some of the biggest pop hits of all time.

Classics from Culture Club (*Karma Chameleon*), Queen (*Radio Ga Ga*) and Wham! (*Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*) appear alongside hits from Black Eyed Peas (*Where Is The Love?*), Girls Aloud (*Sound Of The Underground*) and Leona Lewis (*Bleeding Love*) for a decades-spanning celebration.

Closing with Kylie Minogue's *Padam Padam*, it paves the way for the next chapter in NOW history.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL 80s DANCEFLOOR: DISCO & ELECTRO

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **December 1 Sony**
FORMATS: **2LP Purple And Pink Vinyl**

Another release in NOW's Dancefloor series this time spotlights disco and electro across two discs featuring 29 recordings that showcase the transition between the late '70s and early '80s.

On the back of its popularity in the latter half of the previous decade, the 1980s saw disco retain its melodies and beat but become primarily synth driven, and marking the starting point for this set is Irene Cara's Academy Award-winning *Flashdance... What A Feeling*.

Lipps Inc.'s *Funkytown*, Shalamar's *A Night To Remember* and Indeep's *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life* are among the highlights of this heavily-condensed collection, which places its focus on the defining songs of the period for an all-killer, no-filler result.

Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards of Chic are celebrated as producers and writers with Diana Ross's massive hit *Upside Down*, *Why* from Carly Simon, and Sheila & B. Devotion's *Spacer*, along with the 1984 remixed Sister Sledge's *Lost In Music*, which is included in its full 12" version.

Meanwhile, the transition to electro continues the development into the mid-part of the decade that combined elements of disco, funk and hip-hop on tracks like Chaka Khan's *I Feel For You* and S.O.S. Band's *Just Be Good To Me*.

The latter half of the era also gets its flowers, with contributions from DJ, remixer and producer Jellybean with *Just A Mirage*, and Whitney Houston's signature hit, *I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)*, which ties together the premise of the set perfectly.

CAUGHT *live*

ALTERED IMAGES
BITE 40
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023
229, LONDON
★★★★☆

Forty years ago, 'Bite' (1983) was the third and final album to be released by Altered Images; produced by Mike Chapman and Tony Visconti and steering the group's sound in a more polished and mature direction.

Despite commercial success and featuring one of the group's most successful singles, *Don't Talk To Me About Love*, the LP marked the end of the band's record-releasing run – a hiatus that lasted four decades, before Clare Grogan revived the outfit and finally returned to the studio for last year's comeback, 'Mascara Streakz'.

Songs from that body of work featured in the second act of the show, but it was all about 'Bite' as the Scot took to the stage, glammed up in a black dress and silver earrings with her hair styled back – a look reminiscent of the iconic album cover – and powered through an eight-song set, with the record played front-to-back.

Opening with *Bring Me Closer* and featuring tracks not performed for decades, it was a new experience for the star who admitted her nerves early on. "I've been crying for weeks about this," she shared after the first song, joking: "I'm such a fanny, aren't I?!"

Charm and charisma were in abundance and Grogan's vocals matched those levels too; early nerves subsided several songs in and come the album's midpoint, she found her groove – spurred on by a rapturous reaction to the Top 10 smash *Don't Talk To Me About Love* – and delivered one of the strongest performances of the night on deep cut *Stand So Quiet*.

The single *Change Of Heart* and bouncy *Another Lost Look* came to life in a live setting and incorporated the band – a new ensemble with Grogan the sole founding member, but a unit more than capable of delivering the energy and musicianship that the Altered Images catalogue demands.

Ending the first half with 'Bite' closer, the mid-tempo *Thinking About You*, a short intermission made way for a decades-spanning second half, launching with 'Pinky Blue' (1982) single *I Could Be Happy* before coming up to date with the title song from the fourth Altered Images album, showcasing Grogan's more recent work.

From that LP, the single *Glitter Ball* and deep cut *Double Reflection* – a stormer of a synth-pop tune that stands among their very best – made the set and found their place alongside classics like *See Those Eyes* and *Dead Pop Stars*, the very first Altered Images single.

It was, of course, *Happy Birthday* that closed the show, apt not only as their breakthrough hit but as a signing off from a special evening celebrating an album that helped redefine the post-punk group and, despite proving controversial at the time and paving the way for an extended break, stands out today as a remarkable body of work not only from the group, but the early-'80s altogether.

CAUGHT *live*

JESSIE WARE
THAT! FEELS GOOD! TOUR
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2023
ALEXANDRA PALACE, LONDON
★★★★★

In recent years, Jessie Ware has gone from strength to strength, planting herself firmly in dance floor territory and embracing her largely-queer fanbase, with her transformation into a fully realised disco diva seemingly complete as she commanded the stage at London's Alexandra Palace for the second of two sold-out shows at the venue.

Bringing to an end a world tour in support of her fifth album, 'That! Feels Good!', the singer pulled out all the stops with a radiant performance, entering the stage as her fabulous alter ego, Mother Of Pearl, to the title song from that record, she breezed through a set largely composed of songs from her latest LP and 2020's 'What's Your Pleasure?'.

Adorned in a bold red leotard overlaid with handkerchief-style, floor length fabrics, her charisma was matched by standout vocals sustained throughout the show, with the 10,000 screaming fans ramping the energy in the auditorium up to 11.

Her biggest headline show to date, over two nights Ware performed to as many fans as a sold-out O2 arena, and looking at the set list it's not hard to see why; firing through hit singles such as *Pearls*, *Spotlight* and *Ooh La La*, along with album cuts including *Shake The Bottle*, *Beautiful People* and *Lightning*, it was a filler-free affair showcasing a catalogue of such quality most artists could only dream.

Looking back on *Say You Love Me* from 'Tough Love' (2014) and the 'Glasshouse' (2016) single *Selfish Love* proved to be rare reflective moments in the high-energy spectacle and although Ware proved her chops on more than one occasion with gousto to rival even the strongest vocalists, she wasn't afraid to let loose and lose herself in the moment, delivering a tribute to the New York Ballroom Scene between *Hot N Heavy* and *Freak Me Now* and performing with a microphone doubled as a whip for the sultry *What's Your Pleasure?*, amid a handful of costume changes.

An unwavering showcase of her versatility, the lasting effect is one of a rising superstar at the top of her game, content at having found her place in the pop scene and embracing the LGBTQ+ audience that informed and inspired her direction in recent years and showed up in their thousands to support what's quickly become her most successful run to date.

Having shifted 20,000 tickets in the capital alone and countless more globally, the final stop on Ware's latest run seemed to be a crossroads for the future; over a decade since the release of her debut LP, 'Devotion' (2012), arenas seem a natural next step for the vocalist and will no doubt pave the path forward for the next chapter in her career.

One thing that's for sure is she shows no sign of slowing down and, closing the show with a dazzling cover of Cher's *Believe* and recent hit *Free Yourself*, she signalled there's plenty more to come: "I'm five albums in, and I feel like I've got so much more to do."

PHOTOS CARSTEN WINDHURST

RICK ASTLEY
ARE WE THERE YET? TOUR
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2023
ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON
★★★★☆

Rick Astley was riding high on the success of his ninth album, 'Are We There Yet?', which hit No. 2 on the UK charts in its week of release, when he took to the stage at the Royal Albert Hall for the opening night of his UK tour.

The pop icon's concerts at the west London venue arrived months ahead of the launch of the main leg of his arena trek, which resumes in February and March, but it didn't take long for him - and the crowd - to warm up, as introductory music from 'Star Wars' soon transitioned into his '80s classic, *Together Forever*, and had the entire venue on its feet.

Although celebrating his latest offering, Rick took several opportunities to look to the past and celebrate the anthems that laid the foundations of his career for decades to come, revisiting *She Wants To Dance With Me* and *Whenever You Need Somebody* with interpolations of Lizzo's *Juice* and Chic's *Good Times*, respectively.

They weren't the only times he touched on songs originally by other artists; included in the set was his crowd-pleasing cover of Harry Styles' *As It Was* - which despite calls from fans has yet to be released in studio form - before Rick took to the drums and showed off his skills as a sticksman on a rocking rendition of AC/DC's *Highway To Hell*, performed from behind the kit.

Recent singles such as *Beautiful Life*, *Angels On My Side* and *Dance* also had moments in the show but the centerpiece of Rick's return to the stage was his latest album, from which he delivered six tracks, including the singles *Dippin My Feet*, *Never Gonna Stop* and *Forever And More*.

The guitar-led *Letting Go* and mid-tempo *High Enough* both showcased the quality of his latest offering, which flourished in the live setting, while a tribute to his wife on *Driving Me Crazy* was a visibly emotional moment for the hitmaker.

Frequently seen with a guitar in hand, Rick's live shows are a reminder how far he's come from those early Stock Aitken Waterman days; over the course of 35+ years, he's developed into a fine singer-songwriter and a musician capable of commanding the stage from behind a mic stand, letting his still-distinctive vocals do the talking. Proof of that lies firmly within the new material, which proved as captivating as *those* pop classics which, naturally, had the entire crowd stepping back in time.

A slight rework of the setlist to add meat to the end of the show could have helped balance things out - switching penultimate track *High Enough* with one of his better-known recent singles would probably do the trick - but in reality he can afford to put whatever he likes in that spot because, come the end of the evening, there's only one song on everyone's mind: *Never Gonna Give You Up*.

So there was no surprise when he closed the show with his debut, global chart-topping single and had the entire Royal Albert Hall singing and dancing along, demonstrating once again his credentials as a British pop legend.

PHOTO PETER NEILL

CAUGHT *live*

DAVE STEWART
EURYTHMICS SONGBOOK
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2023
THE PALLADIUM, LONDON
★★★☆☆

It was back in 2019 that Dave Stewart first performed his 'Eurythmics Songbook' show at London's Royal Festival Hall, taking almost five years for him to finally reconvene his superb cast of players and take the concert on the road.

Arriving in London following shows across the continent - and a homecoming gig in Sunderland a week prior - it's an ominous start to the evening with its leading man notably absent from the ensemble on stage and the spotlight instead on the all-female cast of musicians who bring the catalogue to life.

Among them are three vocalists - Australian singer-songwriter Vanessa Amorosi, Warrington-born vocalist RAHH, and his daughter (Annie Lennox's goddaughter), Kaya Stewart - who collectively inject all of their being into the duo's repertoire, each playing to their own strengths to bring a contemporary edge to the material while maintaining its authenticity.

Billed as a 40th anniversary of their breakthrough LP, the mighty 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)' (1983), its title song in fact closed the show, which included hits from most albums in the Eurythmics catalogue, from 1981's 'In The Garden' (opening number *Never Gonna Cry Again*) to 1999's *I Saved The World Today* from final studio album, 'Peace'.

As such, the opening half of the evening was something of a slow burn, with an initially subdued audience largely silent throughout Kaya's opening performance of *Never Gonna Cry Again / The Walk*, before Stewart entered the spotlight from the side of the stage to *This City Never Sleeps*, appearing as the ringleader of his travelling musical circus.

Each vocalist played their part; the father-daughter bond between Stewart and Kaya was clear to see and her musicality clearly passed on from her chart-topping dad, with her rendition of *I Saved The World Today* - which "was written in 45 minutes" and "very apt in this moment in time" - a standout, while RAHH lent a rockier edge to anthems such as *Here Comes The Rain Again* and *Missionary Man*. But it was Amorosi who stole the show with a standout vocal, bringing the room to life with early cuts *I Need A Man* and *Who's That Girl*, and leading singalong moments later in the show with the double-hit of *Thorn In My Side* and *When Tomorrow Comes*.

Having retired from touring, Lennox - who last performed with her former bandmate during their 2022 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction - was naturally missed from the show, and when it seemed for a second that she could make a surprise appearance towards the end of the set, Stewart instead welcomed Beverley Knight to the stage for a powerhouse rendition of the Aretha Franklin collaboration, *Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves*.

The soul star stuck around for the final number, *Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)*, riffing off the girls' tight harmonies and proving that decades on from its release, it remains the ultimate party piece.

There's no denying that everyone on stage was more than qualified to perform the Eurythmics songbook and come the end of the show, there wasn't a person in the house who believed otherwise, despite having such hefty shoes to fill. The set could be reworked to not be so top heavy and for a musician known for documenting so much of his life on camera, a little more archive footage would could have gelled the show together even more, but as a tribute to one of the greatest pop duo's of all time Stewart's band did a cracking job.

PHOTOS DAVE J HOGAN/HOGAN MEDIA

S CLUB
GOOD TIMES TOUR
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2023
THE O2, LONDON
★★★☆☆

It's no secret that S Club's journey back to the stage has been a turbulent one, but where many would put their hands up and surrender the group reached for the stars and delivered a characteristically vibrant show for the final of three stops at The O2.

Taking to the stage in bold, colourful numbers, Jo O'Meara, Jon lee, Rachel Stevens, Bradley McIntosh and Tina Barrett kicked off their 'Good Times Tour' by declaring *'There ain't no party like an S Club party'* - and although they gave nothing by halves, it was a bittersweet affair.

With the absence of the late Paul Cattermole and Hannah Spearritt - who departed the group shortly after his passing - the rap that names all of the original band members was noticeably removed from the song, marking the beginning of a new chapter for S Club.

The first half of the show saw the group power through singles like *Love Ain't Gonna Wait For You*, *You're My Number One* and *Natural*, along with album cuts including *Sunshine* and *Bring The House Down*, with all five members seemingly delivering live vocals while performing their signature high-energy routines.

Huge screens came adorned with a combination of colourful graphics and archive content from the group's early TV shows, performances and behind the scenes footage, once again feeding into the nostalgia of the 25th anniversary run, while the first costume change of the night coincided with the title song of the tour, with recorded vocals from Paul filling the venue.

Towards the end of the track the group reemerged on stage, adorned in black outfits, to join their late bandmate one final time and request the crowd "raise the roof one last time for Paul" for what was, by all accounts, a suitably poignant tribute to the singer, who had been set to take part in the shows before his passing.

Despite the tough subject matter, the mood was soon lifted as the five-piece segued into a selection of their biggest hits, starting with *Bring It All Back* and firing though *Have You Ever*, *Alive* - with a brilliant new reworking courtesy of Simon Ellis - and the anthemic *Reach*, which closed the main portion of the show.

It wasn't long before they returned, however, this time head-to-toe in silver for the classic *Never Had A Dream Come True*, bringing the evening to a close with the UK No. 1 and US Top 10 smash, before a reprise of the opening number, one final time.

Eight years since S Club last reconvened, the pop landscape has changed dramatically and contemporaries of the group such as Steps have carved a niche for themselves with new music and sell-out arena runs. Understandably, S Club's latest venture didn't pan out how they expected and, in spite of that, they still put on a strong show, with new song *These Are The Days* a crowd-pleasing highlight for fans hungry for new music.

If they plan to continue after this nostalgia trip, the band needs to pick up where they left off and get back to recording - the show is proof they've still got it, now they just need to deliver the goods.

PHOTOS CORINNE CUMMING

RELEASE RADAR

Coming soon...

NEW MUSIC

JAMES ARTHUR
BITTER SWEET LOVE

RELEASED: **January 26 *Columbia***

FORMATS: **CD, Limited Edition Green Vinyl, Limited Edition Pink Vinyl**

The fifth offering from the singer-songwriter developed after and inspired by completing a triumphant sold-out US tour!

ZARA LARSSON
VENUS

RELEASED: **February 9 *Epic***

FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Red & Black Marbled Vinyl**

Featuring the hit single *Can't Tame Her*, the fourth LP from the Swedish star is a "pop album fit for a goddess", according to a press release.

USHER
COMING HOME

RELEASED: **February 11 *mega/gamma.***

FORMATS: **Digital, TBA**

Coinciding with his Super Bowl Halftime Show, the record marks his first solo album in nearly eight years since 2016's 'Hard II Love'.

PALOMA FAITH
THE GLORIFICATION OF SADNESS

RELEASED: **February 16 *Sony***

FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Black Vinyl, 1LP Eco Vinyl**

The sixth album from the singer-songwriter is a bold statement of independence, led by the single *How To Leave A Man*.

KAISER CHIEFS
KAISER CHIEFS' EASY EIGHTH ALBUM

RELEASED: **March 1 *V2***

FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Transparent Blue Vinyl, 1LP White Vinyl, Cassette**

Ricky Wilson and co. return with a new sound for their eighth LP, featuring the singles *How 2 Dance* and *Jealousy*.

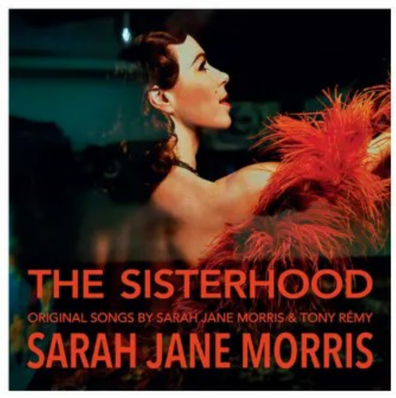
BANANARAMA
GLORIOUS: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

RELEASED: **March 8 *London***

FORMATS: **2CD, 3CD Deluxe Edition, 1LP Red Vinyl, 3LP Gold Vinyl, 3LP Deluxe Red Vinyl, 2Cassette**

Celebrating over four decades of hits, Sara Dallin and Keren Woodward collect 40 of their favourite recordings from across the years.

SARAH JANE MORRIS
THE SISTERHOOD



RELEASED: **March 8 *Fallen Angel***

FORMATS: **CD, Standard Black Vinyl**

The singer-songwriter celebrates the lives of 10 female artists who have inspired her throughout her career.

LENNY KRAVITZ
BLUE ELECTRIC LIGHT

RELEASED: **March 15 *BMG***

FORMATS: **CD, Deluxe CD, 2LP Blue and Pink Vinyl, 2LP Picture Disc**

Largely self-written and performed, the 12th LP from the superstar continues to showcase his mastery of deep-soul rock 'n roll.

SHERYL CROW
EVOLUTION

RELEASED: **March 29 *Big Machine***

FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Black Vinyl**

Having previously signalled the end of her record-releasing career, the country star makes a surprise return following her Hall Of Fame induction.

GABRIELLE
A PLACE IN YOUR HEART

RELEASED: **May 10 *BMG***

FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Transparent Curacao Blue Vinyl**

The follow-up to her Top 5 covers collection, the soul superstar returns with her first collection of original material in six years.

SIA
REASONABLE WOMAN

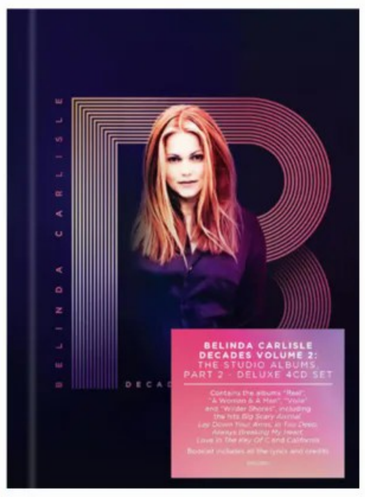
RELEASED: **May *Atlantic***

FORMATS: **Limited Edition Tangerine Vinyl**

The first album from the Australian pop star in eight years, including the lead single *Gimme Love*.

LOOKING BACK

BELINDA CARLISLE
DECADES VOLUME 2: THE STUDIO ALBUMS PART 2



RELEASED: **January 26 *Demon***
FORMATS: **4CD Media Book**

This second 4 CD set contains Belinda's last four albums: Real (1993), A Woman And A Man (1996), Voila (2007) and Wilder Shores (2017).

10CC
20 YEARS 1972-1992

RELEASED: **January 26 *Edsel***
FORMATS: **14CD Box Set**

All the band's studio albums from the period, along with the double live album from 1977, 'Live And Let Live', and two additional CDs of non-album tracks.

KIRSTY MACCOLL FREE WORLD
THE BEST OF KIRSTY MACCOLL 1979-2000

RELEASED: **January 19 *Demon***
FORMATS: **2LP Yellow Vinyl**

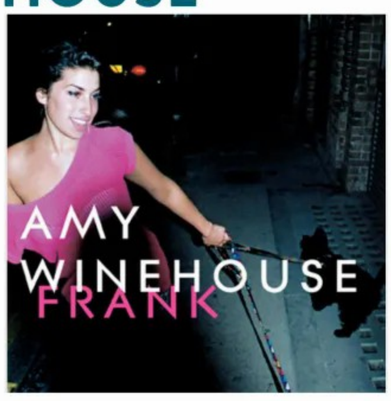
Following demand from fans, the career-spanning collection featuring 25 of Kirsty MacColl's most popular recordings arrives on coloured wax.

GO WEST
DANCING ON THE COUCH

RELEASED: **January 26 *Chrysalis***
FORMATS: **3CD+DVD, 2LP Clear Vinyl**

The follow-up to Peter Cox and Richard Drummie's classic debut, featuring singles such as *True Colours*, *I Want To Hear It From You* and *The King Is Dead* (with BVs from Kate Bush).

AMY WINEHOUSE
FRANK



RELEASED: **February 2 *Island***
FORMATS: **2LP Picture Disc Vinyl**

In line with its 20th anniversary, the debut album from the late star is repressed as a picture disc set for the first time.

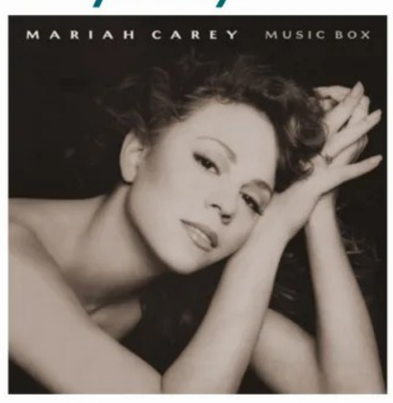
BELINDA CARLISLE
LIVE YOUR LIFE BE FREE

RELEASED: **February 2 *Demon***
FORMATS: **1LP Half-Speed Master Black Vinyl**

Following a National Album Day picture disc release, the fourth album from Belinda - featuring the hit title track - arrives newly remastered.

MARIAH CAREY
MUSIC BOX: 30TH ANNIVERSARY EXPANDED EDITION

RELEASED: **February 2 *Sony***
FORMATS: **3CD, 4LP Black Vinyl**



The classic chart-topping album repackaged with additional, previously-unreleased content and a full live show.

DEAD OR ALIVE
STILL SPINNIN': THE SINGLES COLLECTION

RELEASED: **February 16 *Edsel***
FORMATS: **27CD Box Set**

Celebrating the group's legacy, this latest retrospective set collects the band's singles right through to the recent 'Fan the Flame (Part 2): The Resurrection'.

KYLIE MINOGUE
BODY LANGUAGE

RELEASED: **February 23 *BMG***
FORMATS: **1LP Red Blooded Vinyl**

The ninth album from the pop icon - featuring the chart-topping *Slow* - celebrates its 20th anniversary by making its vinyl debut.

BELINDA CARLISLE
REAL

RELEASED: **April 19 *Demon***
FORMATS: **1LP Half-Speed Master Black Vinyl, 1LP Picture Disc Vinyl**

The fifth solo album from The Go-Go's star gets the reissue treatment with a pair of vinyl pressings in line with previous releases.

For all the latest RETROPOP releases visit RETROPOP MAGAZINE.COM

ONE MORE TIME

Take a whistle-stop tour through **2023** and test your knowledge of the past 12 months in pop!

1 Which country-pop icon put some *'up in her giddy'* as she launched into the year with new music?

2 'Memento Mori' saw which classic act make their debut as a duo?

3 'The Love Invention' was the debut solo album from which electro-pop legend?

4 Celebrating their 20th anniversary, which boy band collaborated with McFly, Jonas Brothers, Hanson and others on their first 'Greatest Hits' album?

5 Which Swedish star made Eurovision history when she took home the trophy for the second time in Liverpool?

6 Over the summer, it was a Minogue double at the top of the UK iTunes Singles Chart with which two tracks?

7 S Club returned with their first single in 20 years as a tribute to Paul Cattermole. What's it called?

8 Which Broadway icon strutted onto the dance floor with the help of Jake Shears and Nile Rodgers for her solo album, 'Drama Queen'?

9 Celebrating 30 years of Eternal, Louise hosted a special one-off gig with guest appearances from which '90s stars?

10 'SMASH' was the singles collection from which pop duo?

11 Which US superstar broke ticket records this year with her 'Renaissance World Tour'?

12 'The Fifth Chapter' is the first pop album in a decade from which soul sensation?

13 'Bauhaus Staircase' gave which synth-pop group the highest-charting studio album of their career?

14 Which actor directed the music video for Rick Astley's single *Forever And More*?

15 Following her death earlier in the year, 'Queen Of Rock 'N' Roll' celebrated which music legend?

16 Duran Duran's latest album, 'Danse Macabre', saw the band reunited with which former members?

17 Following her Hall Of Fame induction, which country icon released the star-studded 'Rockstar'?

18 Which chart-topping '90s boy band returned with their first album in five years in the autumn?

19 Launched in November, the new musical, 'I Should Be So Lucky', celebrates the hits of which iconic pop trio?

20 Cher closed out the year with her first-ever Christmas album and 25th anniversary box set of which classic album?

ANSWERS: 1 Shania Twain; **2** Depeche Mode; **3** Alison Goldfrapp; **4** Busted; **5** Loreen; **6** *Padam Padam* and *We Could Be The One*; **7** *These Are The Days*; **8** Idina Menzel; **9** Michelle Gayle and Kelli Bryan; **10** Pet Shop Boys; **11** Beyoncé; **12** Beverley Knight; **13** OMD; **14** Simon Pegg; **15** Tina Turner; **16** Andy Taylor and Warren Cuccurullo; **17** Dolly Parton; **18** Take That; **19** Stock Aitken Waterman; **20** 'Believe'

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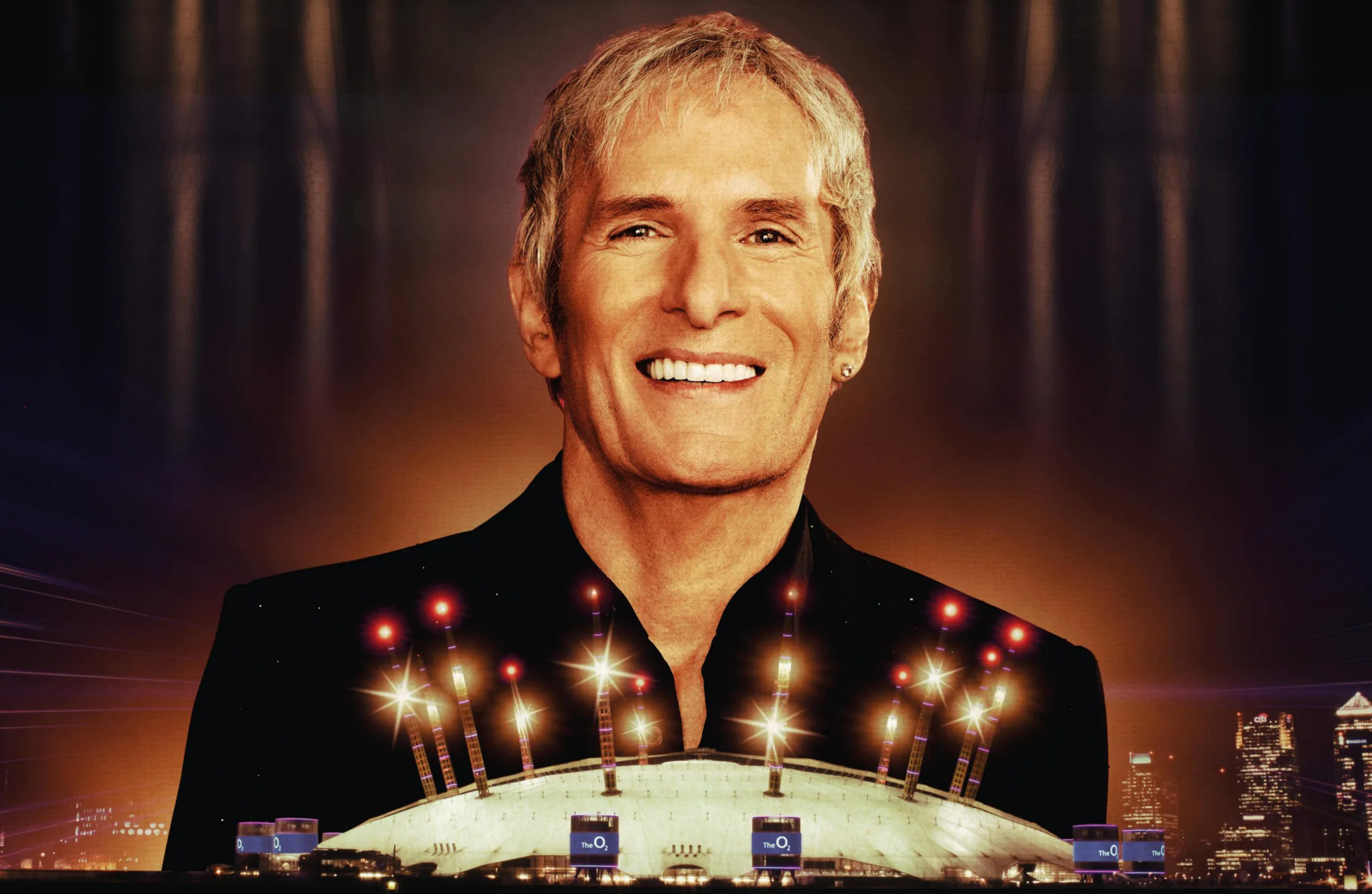

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